The God Beyond Belief
In Defence of William Rowe's Evidential Argument from Evil

by
NICK TRAKAKIS

Why would a loving God who is all-powerful and all-knowing create a world like ours which is marred by all manner of evil, suffering and injustice? This question has come to be known as "the problem of evil" and has troubled both ordinary folk and specialist philosophers and theologians for centuries, with no answer seemingly in sight.

However, in a series of publications from the late 1970s onwards, Professor William Rowe – one of the leading philosophers of religion today – has put forward a powerful case in support of the view that the horrors littering our planet constitute strong evidence against the existence of God. In this book, the first extended study of Rowe's defense of atheism on the basis of evil, Nick Trakakis comprehensively assesses the large body of literature that has developed in response to Rowe's work, paying particular attention to two strategies employed by critics: firstly, the appeal to mystery – the idea that God may well have reasons for permitting evil that lie beyond our comprehension; and secondly, the appeal to theodicies, where this involves offering explanations as to why God allows evil to abound in his creation (free will theodicies, for example, argue that God could not prevent us from acting wrongly without at the same time curtailing or removing our free will). Trakakis unearths significant difficulties in both strategies, and concludes that – absent any evidence in support of theism – the God of theism must be judged to be "beyond belief".

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IN DEFENCE OF WILLIAM ROWE'S EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT FROM EVIL

by

NICK TRAKAKIS

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Printed on acid-free paper

Cover art: *Animal Fates*, Franz Marc, 1913. Oil on canvas, 195 × 263.6 cm
Photo Credit: Kunstmuseum Basel, Martin Bühler

To my father and mother
for giving me the opportunity to pursue my dreams

And to my wife, Helen
amor magnus doctor est

In the light of our experience and knowledge of the variety and scale of human and animal suffering in our world, the idea that none of this suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or permitting an evil at least as bad seems an extraordinary, absurd idea, quite beyond our belief.

<div style="text-align: right;">

William Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and
Some Varieties of Atheism," p.338

</div>

After such knowledge, what forgiveness?

<div style="text-align: right;">

T.S. Eliot, "Gerontion"

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FOREWORD

For quite some time I have corresponded with Nick Trakakis, a very talented young philosopher at Monash University in Australia. He was completing a manuscript on the problem of evil. Although we've never met, I've come to greatly admire his philosophical ability, even, or I hope particularly, when he notes weaknesses, if not outright mistakes, in my own writings on this topic. His knowledge of the relevant literature is nothing short of extraordinary. I am deeply impressed by the clarity and quality of his writing, his measured judgments, as well as his philosophical ability.

In this volume Trakakis begins with my 1979 paper, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," sets forth the evidential argument from evil, and considers the large body of literature developed in response to that argument. He examines and evaluates with great care the objections raised by Wykstra, Howard-Snyder, Durston, Alston, and others, along with my responses to those forceful objections. Noting the importance of the assumption that if there are God-justifying goods for horrendous human and animal suffering then it is likely that humans would have some awareness of what those justifying goods might be, Trakakis carefully evaluates the literature bearing on this crucial issue, including, of course, the significance of what is commonly known as the problem of divine hiddenness, and the line of response proposed by the sceptical theists – philosophers who are theists but sceptical of arguments against theism. The book concludes with an insightful discussion and evaluation of several important theodicies: attempts to specify good states of affairs that, if realized, might reasonably be thought to justify an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting the horrendous evils that are present in our world.

William L. Rowe

PREFACE

The renowned German artist, Anselm Kiefer, exhibited in 1990 a large conceptual sculpture (5 metres high and 11 metres long) made of lead books sitting on an iron bookshelf. He called it *The Breaking of Vessels*, after a Jewish kabbalistic tradition according to which God attempted to contain all the evil in glass vessels. The glass, however, broke and evil escaped into the world. And it has been the fate of humanity ever since to seek *tikkun olam* (Hebrew for 'the reconstruction of the world') by recapturing the evil that had been let loose. The innumerable evils of our time, typified by the Holocaust and the September 11 terrorist attacks, give much poignancy to this kabbalistic myth.

Philosophy, Plato tells us, begins with a sense of wonder, particularly a wonder rooted in the experience of beauty. My thinking has also been grounded in a sense of wonder, but a sense of wonder over the unspeakable horrors that humans are capable of. Like many others, this wonder first surfaced when I learnt in primary school of the Holocaust (or *Shoah*), the Nazis' vast operation in genocide during World War II. We are now only too familiar with the chilling details of this sad chapter in human history. In the light of such horrors, the challenge for one seeking a theistic understanding of the world is to attain *tikkun olam*, to recapture the evil that has escaped from the broken vessels, or (less metaphorically) to show that evil does not render senseless the view of the world as the creation of a loving God. How well the theist fares in the face of this challenge is the subject of my present inquiry.

The study that follows is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation submitted to Monash University in 2005. I have many people to thank for their support and encouragement in the course of writing the dissertation and subsequently converting it into a book. I owe a special debt of gratitude

to my doctoral supervisors (Graham Oppy and Dirk Baltzly) for their invaluable guidance, and to my examiners (Paul Draper and John Schellenberg) for their many helpful comments and searching criticisms. I have, furthermore, benefited greatly from feedback received on selected portions of material from a host of other people, including: William Alston, Winfried Corduan, Peter Forrest, Daniel Howard-Snyder, Lloyd Humberstone, Richard Otte, Nicole Saunders, Richard Swinburne, Joel Tierno, and Stephen Wykstra. Bruce Langtry's fourth-year (Honours) course on the problem of evil at the University of Melbourne in 2004 also provided many hours of illuminating discussion on topics related to this work.

It would be remiss of me, however, to not mention two further people who have contributed greatly to my intellectual development. The first is William Rowe, whose work serves as a model of philosophical acumen, and who also provided very helpful comments on parts of this work. The second is my former New Testament History lecturer, Rev. Themistocles Adamopoulo, whose friendship and support have sustained me throughout my time as a student and beyond.

I also cannot fail to acknowledge the tremendous love and sacrifices of my parents, George and Chrysoula. And last but not least, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to my wife, Helen, without whom this work would not have been possible.

NOTE ON GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

In the present work, the masculine pronoun 'he' will often be used to refer to 'God', while the feminine pronoun 'she' will often be used in the generic sense to refer to a single person. Although such usage is unfortunate, a decision had to be made that would be as non-discriminatory and stylistically sound as possible. In the case of the term 'God', it would be intolerable to continually repeat the noun where a pronoun would seem more natural, and so I have chosen to follow the traditional use of the masculine pronoun 'he'. This decision, however, is made with a degree of regret, for there is a need for more inclusive, less androcentric language about God. To counterbalance the use of the masculine pronoun in relation to 'God', 'she' will be used in most cases as the pronoun of common gender. Even though this usage may also have its problems, the alternatives (e.g., 's/he', 'he or she', 'they', 'one') appear to be even more troublesome.

1. INTRODUCTION

> Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky.
>
> Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever.
>
> Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never.[1]

With haunting words such as these, Elie Wiesel reflects on a childhood spent in the concentration camps of Auschwitz and Buchenwald, describing in particular the "flames" that consumed not only his parents, his younger sister, and thousands others, but also his faith in a loving God. For Wiesel, and many like him, God died at Auschwitz. As Eugene Borowitz explains,

> The argument against God seemed irrefutable. Any God who could permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could "hide His face" while it dragged on, was not worth believing in. There might well be a limit to how much we could understand about Him, but Auschwitz demanded an unreasonable suspension of understanding. In the face of such great evil, God, the good and the powerful, was too inexplicable. So men said, "God is dead."[2]

But despite the significance and tragic dimensions of the Holocaust, it is merely one of countless horrific evils that have littered our world. History, as Hegel reminds us, is "the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed."[3] However, one does not need to delve too far back into the past to discern the depth and scope of evil. One need only consult the morning newspapers to find out what horrors have been accomplished or befallen us overnight: a 'suicide-bomber' kills several people and injures many more in west Jerusalem; a Washington mother, having dressed and fed her three children, smokes some crack cocaine and then strangles two of her children to death with a clothesline, and attempts without success to do the same with her third child; a volcano in Congo leaves 450,000 people homeless; two Kenyan teenagers are charged with murdering 67 of their schoolmates by setting their dormitory on fire.[4] The list could go on and on *ad nauseam*, literally. In the face of such perplexing evil, how could one accept or retain the belief that the world was created and is governed by an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God? This, very roughly, is the problem of evil, and it is undoubtedly one of the greatest stumbling blocks faced by those who wish to commend belief in God. It is no surprise, therefore, to find one of the most prominent contemporary theists, Alvin Plantinga, writing that, "Of all the antitheistic arguments, only the argument from evil deserves to be taken really seriously."[5]

1   AIMS AND LIMITATIONS

My aim in this study is to determine whether evil does in fact constitute a barrier towards theistic belief. More precisely, my aim is to determine whether a specific evidential argument from evil developed and defended by William Rowe (b. 1931) constitutes a good reason to reject theism. The criteria Rowe's argument must meet before it can be considered successful in this respect will be considered in Section 3 below.

My decision to focus on Rowe was not a difficult one to make. To begin with, Rowe's work on the evidential argument from evil now occupies a central place in discussions on the problem of evil, and for this reason alone it would be unwise to overlook Rowe's contribution.[6] In addition, and more importantly, Rowe's various publications on the problem of evil, like much of his work in other areas of philosophy of religion, are distinguished by their clarity, rigour, originality, and depth. One further characteristic trait in Rowe's writings, not often found amongst critics of theism, is his sensitive and sympathetic treatment of the claims of theism (this, I suspect, was fostered

by his undergraduate studies at the Chicago Theological Seminary, followed by his postgraduate work on the theology of Paul Tillich under the auspices of William Alston[7]). Finally, the evidential argument from evil developed by Rowe and examined here captures in a simple and intuitively appealing way what many theists and non-theists find troubling about God and evil. For these reasons, an examination of Rowe's argument promises to be a rewarding experience.

The first limitation of the present work, therefore, is its concentration on one particular version of the evidential argument from evil as formulated by William Rowe. This does not mean, however, that the range of issues to be investigated will be limited, since Rowe's argument provides a convenient springboard for delving into a number of topics (such as theodicy, divine hiddenness, and the nature of evil).

A second limitation is that this work, as its sub-title suggests, will be a defence of Rowe's evidential argument.[8] I call this a limitation because a defence of one argument in favour of atheism is by no means a defence of atheism itself. A proper defence of atheism would also need to take into account whatever grounds there might be in support of theistic belief (as well as whatever other grounds there might be against theistic belief). To lay my cards on the table from the outset, I consider myself a theist, albeit a quite tentative one. Although I will be supporting Rowe's evidential argument, I believe that there is even stronger evidence in support of theism that defeats the negative evidence generated by the problem of evil. I cannot indicate here how exactly this negative evidence can be overthrown, though I will point out very shortly that the challenge of overthrowing such evidence is a much more formidable one than many have suspected.

A final limitation, and one faced by all who dare to explore the problem of evil, arises from the vast literature that exists on this subject. Barry Whitney, for example, has catalogued 4,237 items (including books, journal papers, and dissertations) that have been written or published from 1960 to 1990 and have at least some relevance to the problem of evil.[9] Had Whitney not confined himself to this time period or to items written in English, his bibliography may have been impossible to compile. One may therefore be led to doubt whether anything new or anything of importance can be said about this well-trodden subject. My preferred method for combating such doubt is to ignore it. The following excerpt from Peter Kreeft's *Making Sense Out of Suffering* hopefully explains why:

> *Reader*: But your subject [the problem of evil] is well worn. Hundreds of books have been written on it. How is yours different?
>
> *Author*: I don't know and I don't care.

Reader: What kind of an answer is that?

Author: An honest one.

Reader: Shouldn't you at least try to be original?

Author: I don't think so. I think the people who try the hardest to be original end up being silly or else saying old stuff in camouflaged new ways. But if you simply try to tell the truth honestly, as you see it, you usually end up being original without trying. Originality is like happiness: snatch at it and it disappears. The only way to get it is to forget it.[10]

2   METHODOLOGY

The key methodological principle guiding my discussion and evaluation of Rowe's argument is the principle of neutrality, that is to say, the adoption of a neutral or agnostic standpoint with respect to the truth of theism. This means that we must not presume that theism is true or that atheism is true when formulating or evaluating an evidential argument from evil. Instead, we are to assume that theism is just as likely to be true as atheism. According to this 'methodological agnosticism', we are to treat the problem of evil in isolation from other grounds there might be in support of atheism and whatever grounds there might be in support of theism. Michael Peterson advocates a similar procedure when stating that "what is needed … is to find out how much can be determined about gratuitous evil within the context of the problem itself, without drawing from allegedly independent arguments [for or against theism]."[11] Likewise, J.L. Schellenberg, prior to developing an argument against theism based on the phenomenon of divine hiddenness, points out that he will "assume that the relevant evidence (exclusive of evidence adduced in this book) does not clearly favor either the conclusion that there is a God or its denial."[12]

One way of understanding such a methodology is in terms of what Rowe calls *The Level Playing Field Assumption*, or LPA.[13] According to LPA, our 'background information' – that is, the information on which we rely when evaluating the premises of an evidential argument from evil – must 'level the playing field' by setting the probability of God's existing at 0.5 and the probability of God's not existing at 0.5. Anything that significantly confirms or disconfirms theism, and anything that entails that God exists or that God does not exist, is not admissible as background information. In fact, our background information, according to Rowe, must be restricted to the beliefs that are held in common by theists and non-theists if it is to deliver

a level playing field. This way of proceeding, as will be shown in Chapter 3, is central to Rowe's most recent (or Bayesian) evidential argument, but it is troublesome because there is no guarantee that the body of shared background information will not give a higher probability to one side in the debate over the other.[14] To avoid this problem, we may think of LPA as counselling us to begin with the assumption that the probability of theism given background information k is 0.5 and the probability of atheism given k is 0.5, where k consists of *whatever information (if any) is consistent with such an assignment of probabilities*.

What justification is there for adopting LPA? In his recent Bayesian argument, Rowe employs LPA when assigning probability values to various propositions that go to make up his background information (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1). But Rowe's justification for adopting LPA is questionable. Rowe states:

> Many nontheists hold that the enormous amount of evil in our world, particularly instances of horrendous human or animal suffering such as $E1$ and $E2$, make the existence of the theistic God unlikely. Many theists and some nontheists, however, will disagree with this assessment. On the other hand, many theists will argue that the mere existence of a world (or the order in the world) makes the existence of God likely. But some theists and many nontheists will disagree with his assessment. In order not to beg any of these questions, I will assign a probability of 0.5 to Pr (G/k), and, of course, 0.5 to Pr $(\sim G/k)$. We will say that k by itself makes neither God's existence nor his nonexistence more likely than not.[15]

On this view, whatever negative evidential impact is made by horrendous evil is counterbalanced by the positive evidential impact made by the existence of a world (or a world exhibiting order), so that our background information leaves the probability of 'God exists' at 0.5. However, in arriving at this probability assignment in this fashion Rowe seems to be assuming that whatever evidence can be provided in support of theism is cancelled out by the evidence in support of atheism. Whether or not this claim is true, it is perhaps not the best rationale that can be given for LPA. For first of all, by assuming from the outset (i.e., even before considering any evidential argument from evil) that evil renders the existence of God unlikely, the case has surely been begged against the theist. And secondly, it is more advisable to leave the matter open as to whether there is any (propositional or non-propositional) evidence in support of theism or atheism.

A more promising rationale for LPA would proceed on purely pragmatic grounds. My aim is to determine what evidential bearing evil has on theistic

belief *once we put aside* any other reasons or grounds there may be against theism as well as any reasons or grounds there may be in support of theism. Indeed, this is not merely my aim, but Rowe's as well. In a recent exchange on the problem of evil with Daniel Howard-Snyder and Michael Bergmann, Rowe states the central topic of discussion as follows:

> Grounds for belief in God aside, do the evils in our world make atheistic belief more reasonable than theistic belief?[16]

But if that is our concern, then we obviously cannot include, say, a version of the ontological argument that we consider to be sound in our background information. Given our stated aim, we must adopt a methodological agnosticism when developing or assessing evidential arguments from evil.[17]

The pragmatic status of LPA clearly means that, even if the evidence of evil reduces the probability that God exists from 0.5 to (say) 0.33, other evidence may be available that raises the probability back up to 0.5 or beyond. Rowe admits this much when saying that

> I have *not* argued that no matter what other evidence a person has, the argument from evil will still make it unreasonable for that person (who understands the argument from evil and accepts the grounds for its premises) to believe in God. For one might have stronger evidence for the existence of God than is provided by the problem of evil for the nonexistence of God.[18]

There is an important difficulty with this position that Rowe overlooks. If one accepts that some evidential argument from evil reduces the probability that God exists below 0.5, then what evidence could one possibly appeal to in order to support the proposition that there exists a *perfectly good* being? Let's briefly consider some options.

First, one may appeal to some version of the three traditional theistic proofs: the cosmological, ontological, and teleological arguments. But apart from the ontological argument, these arguments, even if sound, do not reveal anything about the moral character of the being whose existence they purport to establish. Cosmological arguments, for example, typically seek to show that there exists a first cause or first unmoved mover, while teleological arguments usually aim to show that there exists an intelligent designer of the universe.

One may therefore look to some other theistic arguments, such as moral arguments and arguments from religious experience. But again the same problem surfaces. A moral argument may establish the existence of

a divine lawgiver or a being that is the ultimate source of moral obligation. Clearly, such a being would have to be moral and good, but it need not be *perfectly* good.

The appeal to religious experience may take the form of a theistic argument based on the various experiences people claim to have of God. Alternatively, one may appeal to a direct, non-inferentially justified belief in God grounded in some religious experience. This latter strategy is championed by Reformed epistemologists who maintain that non-propositional evidence, such as direct acquaintance with God, may play an important role in the epistemic justification of one's beliefs. As Plantinga states,

> It could be that the theist is like someone who has substantial propositional evidence against the claim that pigeons are to be found near Devil's Tower, and no propositional evidence for it; in point of fact, however, he is in full view of the tower and sees several large flocks of pigeons flying around it. He may be like the person who shares with his accusers propositional evidence for the claim that he failed to mail his tax return; he himself, however, clearly remembers that he did. In such a case the belief in question has much by way of warrant or positive epistemic status, despite the propositional evidence against it; no doubt he knows that he mailed it in, despite the propositional evidence against it. And of course the same may be true for belief in God. Our question as to the warrant of theistic belief cannot properly be settled just by examining whether the propositional evidence tells for or against it. We must also look into the question what sort of non-propositional warrant, if any, such belief enjoys.[19]

Plantinga's point is well taken. But he overlooks a crucial difficulty, which may be put as follows: Even if religious experience could reveal that there exists some transcendent being and that this being has certain qualities, how could it provide any justification for a highly specific belief such as *There exists a perfectly good God*? Consider, for example, the following scenario envisaged by Plantinga:

> When life is sweet and satisfying, a spontaneous sense of gratitude may well up within the soul; someone in this condition may thank and praise the Lord for his goodness, and will of course have the accompanying belief that indeed the Lord is to be thanked and praised.[20]

In certain circumstances, then, one may experience life as "sweet and satisfying" and thereupon form (in the basic way) the belief *God is good* or *God is to be thanked and praised*. But the belief that *God is good* is not the

same as the belief that *God is perfectly good*. And it seems implausible that some personal experience (other than a direct revelation) could justify one in ascribing not just goodness but a highly specific property like perfect goodness to some person.[21]

To be sure, it is sometimes claimed by mystics that the Reality they are in touch with is supremely perfect in nature. Perhaps, then, the belief in a perfectly good being can be grounded or based on such mystical experiences. This strategy, however, runs up against a significant obstacle: How can we determine whether an alleged 'encounter' with a perfect being is veridical or illusory?[22]

Finally, one may resort to the deliverances of revelation as contained, for example, in some text that is held to be divinely inspired.[23] But as with appeals to mystical experience, it is notoriously difficult to provide some non-question-begging reason (i.e., some reason that does not presuppose the existence of a perfect being) to think that a particular divine revelation is authentic and not spurious.

Suppose, then, that a theist adopts LPA and concludes that some version of the evidential argument from evil succeeds in reducing the probability value of theism from 0.5 to 0.33. Suppose also that she finds no ontological argument convincing. What could such a theist do to reinstate the credibility of her belief in God? Short of solving the problems raised by appeals to mystical experience and revelation, this unfortunate theist would be obliged to renounce her theism. What this indicates is that the problem of evil may be much more serious than is supposed by many unwary theists.[24]

3   WHAT IS A GOOD ARGUMENT?

If we wish to determine whether a particular version of the evidential argument from evil as developed by Rowe is a good or successful argument, we must have some idea as to what constitutes a good or successful argument. Although this is a large topic, something must be said about it so as to guard Rowe's argument from unrealistic demands being imposed on it (and to also prevent Rowe from achieving too easy a victory).

I will begin with Stephen Davis' account of a good or successful theistic proof, since what he has to say would apply equally to anti-theistic proofs such as Rowe's evidential argument.[25] According to Davis, a theistic proof TP must satisfy the following criteria in order to count as successful:

(1)   TP must be formally valid – that is, it is not possible for its conclusion to be false and all its premises to be true;

(2) TP must be informally valid – that is, it must not commit any of the 'informal fallacies' such as begging the question and equivocation, and

(3) the premises of TP are known to be reasonable or plausible.

Davis construes (1)–(3) as conditions that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a theistic proof to be successful. Of these three conditions, the third is likely to arouse most opposition, and so Davis' reasons for accepting (3) may be briefly outlined.[26]

Davis begins with a discussion of the (primary) goal or purpose of theistic proofs. One possibility is that a theistic proof aims at convincing people that God exists. But as Davis points out, the difficulty here is identifying the class of people such a proof is intended to convince. For example, is a theistic proof intended to convince everyone who hears and follows it, or every *rational* person who hears and follows it, or every rational person who *believes its premises*? Another possibility, the one favoured by Davis, is that the goal of a theistic proof is *to demonstrate the rationality of belief in the existence of God*. On this view, the purpose of a theistic proof is to create "a situation in which rational people who hear and follow the proof may rationally believe in the existence of God."[27]

But if the chief function of a theistic proof is to demonstrate the rationality of theistic belief, it follows that a successful theistic proof must have premises that are at least *known to be reasonable or plausible*. On Davis' account, then, the premises of a successful proof need not be true or known to be true; it is sufficient if they are recognized as being plausible or rational. It is somewhat unclear, however, what Davis means by 'premise *P* is known or recognized by person *S* to be plausible'. I take it that at least part of what Davis means to say is that 'it is reasonable for *S* to believe that *P* is true'.[28]

Davis adds that the premises of a successful proof must be known to be plausible "by the people to whom the rationality of belief in the existence of God is to be demonstrated (including presumably, the person who offers the proof)."[29] Again, there lurks an ambiguity here. At one point Davis states that the purpose of theistic proofs is "to demonstrate the rationality of theistic belief to *all rational persons* (whoever exactly they are)."[30] It seems, then, that the premises of a successful theistic proof must be known to be plausible by all rational persons. But this is unsatisfactory if only because it is unlikely that the premises of any given theistic proof would be accepted by *all* rational persons (unless the extension of 'rational persons' is circumscribed in some controversial way). To restore Davis' account, let's say that the premises of a successful theistic proof must be such that it is reasonable for a person *S* to believe them, where *S* may be (but need not be) restricted entirely to the person offering the proof.[31]

Davis' account, though requiring further elaboration (especially in regards to the notions of 'rationality' and 'plausibility'), seems to be on the right track. For one thing, the standards of success delineated by Davis would liberate theists from the unrealistic requirement that a good theistic argument must be convincing to everyone who is acquainted with the argument.[32] No philosophical argument with a non-trivial conclusion meets this requirement. In its place, therefore, Davis (following the lead of George Mavrodes) proposes a 'person-relative' conception of proof. On this view, what counts as a good theistic argument will vary from person to person, depending in part on what one already knows and reasonably believes. An argument, therefore, may constitute a successful proof for some people but not for others.[33]

Drawing on Davis' account of what makes for a successful theistic proof, I will judge an argument against the existence of God to be successful only if it bears the following properties:

(4) its conclusion asserts (or obviously entails) that God does not exist;
(5) it is formally valid;
(6) it is informally valid, and
(7) it is reasonable for S to believe that its premises are true, where S refers to the person offering the argument and, possibly, some members of that person's audience.

Given the methodological constraints identified in Section 2 above, a successful argument must also

(8) be based on background information k such that $\Pr(G/k) = 0.5$ and $\Pr(\sim G/k) = 0.5$, where 'G' corresponds to 'God exists'.[34]

The success of Rowe's case for atheism will therefore be judged in accordance with criteria (4)–(8).[35]

4   OVERVIEW

But before proceeding directly to Rowe's case for atheism, I will continue in the next chapter with several preliminary matters in order to provide the necessary philosophical and historical background to Rowe's argument. I will then, in Chapter 3, present an outline of the three versions of the evidential argument developed and defended by Rowe during his career. With all introductory and expository matters in place, I will begin the critical

evaluation of one of the evidential arguments put forward by Rowe. In Chapters 4 through to 8 I will discuss what has come to be known as the 'sceptical theist' critique, a position that emphasizes the inscrutability of God's ways. I will then proceed, in Chapters 9–11, to the topic of theodicy, first formulating some adequacy conditions that any satisfactory theodicy must meet, before assessing various theodical proposals in the light of these adequacy conditions. Next, Chapter 12 will examine the relationship between gratuitous evil and theism, and some recent attempts to reconcile the two. In the final concluding chapter, the results of Chapters 4–12 will be brought to bear upon the question of whether Rowe's evidential argument can be judged a success.

NOTES

[1]   Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (London: Penguin, 1981 [originally published in French in 1958]), p. 45. This brilliant work was written by Wiesel after a 10-year self-imposed silence on the subject of the Holocaust. Another excellent treatment of the problem of evil is provided by Wiesel in *The Trial of God (As It Was Held on February 25, 1649, in Shamgorod): A Play in Three Acts*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Random House, 1979 [originally published in French in 1979]). This play was inspired by an actual event witnessed by Wiesel whilst in Auschwitz involving three rabbis who decided one evening to indict God for allowing his children to be massacred. Having found God guilty of crimes against humanity, the rabbis proceeded to recite their evening prayers!

[2]   Eugene B. Borowitz, *The Mask Jews Wear: The Self-Deception of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), p. 199. Borowitz, I might add, is only explicating and not supporting the Jewish death-of-God movement. For an insightful empirical study of the effects of the Holocaust on the faith of Jewish survivors, see Reeve Robert Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors* (New York: The Free Press, 1980), esp. ch. 3. On the basis of data collected from 708 respondents to a lengthy questionnaire, Brenner found that "53 percent of all survivors – more than half the survivor community – consciously and specifically asserted that the Holocaust affected or, to a certain extent, modified their faith in God" (p. 103). Further, Brenner stated that "the Holocaust must be considered as having influenced a rather sizable population of survivors to become (more) religious … On balance, however, it can be said that the Holocaust served more to undermine than to buttress the faith of survivors" (p. 104).

[3]   G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953 [originally published in German in 1837]), p. 27.

[4]   These are actual events taken from newspaper reports in late January 2002, with the exception of the account of the Washington mother, Patricia Hill – this was taken from Lance Morrow's article, "Evil," in *Time* (Australia), vol. 6, no. 23, June 10, 1991, p. 47.

[5]   Plantinga, "A Christian Life Partly Lived," in Kelly J. Clark (ed.), *Philosophers Who Believe: The Spiritual Journeys of 11 Leading Thinkers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 72.

[6]   Rowe, it may be noted, has never endorsed a logical argument from evil, and has in fact consistently supported Plantinga's response to such arguments – see, for example, Rowe's "In

Defense of 'The Free Will Defense'," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 44 (1998): 115–20. The distinction between evidential and logical arguments from evil is explicated in Section 2.1.2 of Chapter 2.

[7]   Rowe's doctorate (*An Examination of the Philosophical Theology of Paul Tillich*, University of Michigan, 1961) formed the basis of his first book, *Religious Symbols and God: A Philosophical Study of Tillich's Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968). Although most of Rowe's work is directly related to the philosophy of religion, he has also published widely on the debate over freedom and determinism, particularly as this debate was played out in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries amongst such figures as John Locke and Thomas Reid. Rowe's research in this area culminated in *Thomas Reid on Freedom and Morality* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), an exposition and defence of Reid's libertarian account of free will. For an overview of Rowe's life and works, see my entry on Rowe in John R. Shook (ed.), *The Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2005), pp. 2087–89, and my interview with Rowe in *Philosophy Now* 47 (2004): 16–18. I am also presently editing a collection of Rowe's writings, entitled *William Rowe on Philosophy of Religion: Selected Works*, due to be published by Ashgate in 2008.

[8]   Unless otherwise stated, whenever I refer to 'Rowe's evidential argument' (or 'Rowe's argument') I mean to refer to that evidential argument developed and defended by Rowe during his early and middle periods (discussed more fully in Chapter 3), which argument forms the focus of the present study.

[9]   See Barry L. Whitney, *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil, 1960–1990* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993). Whitney is presently preparing a supplementary volume, covering the period 1990–2000 (personal communication, October 11, 2004).

[10]   Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), p. 29.

[11]   Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 87.

[12]   J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 11–12.

[13]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 271.

[14]   Rowe himself recognizes this in "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 283, fn. 10.

[15]   Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 265. '$E1$' and '$E2$' refer to two particular instances of evil (these will be explicated in Chapter 3), 'G' refers to 'God exists' and 'k' to one's background information.

[16]   Rowe, "Grounds for Belief Aside, Does Evil Make Atheism More Reasonable than Theism" in Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), p. 124.

[17]   A somewhat different rationale for LPA can be given along the following lines: If we rejected LPA and assumed, for instance, that theism is true then there would be no point in even considering an evidential argument from evil. Given that we start from the position that theism is true, any atheological argument would be deemed unsound from the outset (without even knowing where the argument went wrong). LPA, therefore, ensures that theistic and anti-theistic arguments are not trivialized in this way.

[18]   Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 266, emphasis his. Similar sentiments are expressed by Alston in "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 31, and Swinburne in *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 23–24.

[19]   Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," *Archivio di Filosofia* 56 (1988): 583. See also Plantinga, "The Foundations of Theism: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 310–12. In

reply to this latter paper, Philip Quinn has argued that intellectually sophisticated contemporary theists would rarely be privileged with basic theistic beliefs that enjoy a degree of warrant or justification sufficient to defeat by themselves a defeater of theism like the evidential argument from evil – see Quinn, "The Foundations of Theism Again: A Rejoinder to Plantinga," in Linda Zagzebski (ed.), *Rational Faith: Catholic Responses to Reformed Epistemology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), pp. 14–47, esp. pp. 37–45.

[20]   Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," in Plantinga and Wolterstorff (eds), *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. 80.

[21]   Paul Draper argues that, even if Reformed epistemologists are correct in thinking that religious experience may confer direct justification to theistic belief, other experiences (e.g., the experience of horrific evil) may confer equal or greater justification of the non-inferential sort to the belief that there is no theistic God – see Draper, "Evil and the Proper Basicality of Belief in God," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 135–47. This would pose a serious problem for Reformed epistemology only if it is true that most adult theists find themselves with equally compelling experiences of both sorts – but it is not clear that the majority of adult theists are in this position. In any case, I would maintain that the phenomenon of religious diversity precludes any informed adult from being justified in accepting theistic belief entirely in the basic way. I defend this position in *A Critical Examination of Alvin Plantinga's Thesis of Theistic Belief as Properly Basic* (unpublished Honours Thesis submitted to the University of Melbourne, 1997). A similar position has been defended by David Basinger, "Plantinga, Pluralism and Justified Religious Belief," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 67–80.

[22]   The lack of objective criteria in determining whether some experience of God is veridical or illusory is taken by Rowe to be a fatal weakness in arguments from religious experience such as those advocated by C.D. Broad and Richard Swinburne – see Rowe, "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 13 (1982): 85–92.

[23]   C. Stephen Evans, for example, contends that we can come to know that God is perfectly loving on the basis of God's self-revelation in the Bible. This knowledge would then defeat atheological arguments from evil by assuring us that God has good reasons for allowing evil, even if we do not know what these reasons are. See Evans, *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 102–03.

[24]   The difficulties involved in overturning a successful evidential argument from evil are also acknowledged by Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," *Noûs* 23 (1989): 347, and Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil," in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2002 edition, located at <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2002/entries/evil>, Sections 4.3.1–4.3.2. As mentioned earlier, I hold that a strong case can be developed in support of theism that defeats the evidence against theism generated by the problem of evil. To meet the problem of showing that a *perfect* being exists, I like to appeal to a version of the ontological argument. A more commonplace, but perhaps equally controversial, strategy would be to appeal to the principle of simplicity. On this view, as Richard Swinburne puts it, "that there is an omnipotent God is a simpler hypothesis than the hypothesis that there is a God who has such-and-such limited power" (*The Existence of God*, rev. ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, p. 94). Similar things, of course, can be said about a God who is good or knowledgeable to some degree in comparison with a God who is infinite in goodness and knowledge.

Richard Otte has recently criticized the kind of methodology espoused here (i.e., one based on LPA) on the grounds that it allows one to single out and focus only on some evidence we have, rather than giving equal consideration to all relevant evidence. The result, according to Otte, is that such a methodology can be used to construct an argument to support any position whatever (see

Otte, "Rowe's Probabilistic Argument from Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 19 (2002): 167–68). Suppose, for example, that our background information is developed along the lines suggested by LPA and the only evidence before us consists of the fact that some people feel a deep impulse to believe in God. In such a scenario, observes Otte, it would be plausible to claim that our evidence raises the probability of God's existing relative to our background information. But then we, following Rowe's procedure, may conclude that "it is irrational to disbelieve in God unless we have strong evidence against the existence of God" (p. 168). Thus, Rowe's procedure (i.e., LPA) can be used to support any position we want.

I wish to make two points by way of reply. First of all, by employing LPA, Rowe need not ignore other evidence either for or against theism. Rather, this other evidence can be considered at a later stage to see whether it reinforces or overthrows the case against theism based on the facts of evil. Otte is not unaware of this, but claims in a separate paper that it is a mistake to consider whether some piece of evidence, taken on its own, lowers the probability of theism. Instead, "we need to look at all of the evidence together and see the effect it has on the probability of one's religious beliefs" (Otte, "Evidential Arguments from Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 48 (2000): 8). This is because, even though pieces of evidence may individually disconfirm a hypothesis, the conjunction of this (negative) evidence may in fact confirm the hypothesis. It is unlikely, however, that such a situation could arise in relation to evidential arguments from evil. For if the evidence of evil E_1 disconfirms theism, and some other evidence E_2 also disconfirms theism, it is difficult to see how the conjunction of E_1 and E_2 could serve to confirm theism.

The second point I wish to make is that it is wrong to suppose that any position whatever can be supported by focusing exclusively on some piece of evidence. Take, for example, Otte's example of attempting to raise the probability of God's existing by focusing solely on the fact that some people are naturally inclined to believe in God. Call this fact 'E' and theism 'T'. Firstly, it is not clear how E alone raises the probability of T – more needs to be said to show that E has this effect. Indeed, if it can be shown that all those who are naturally disposed to believe in God are also naturally disposed to accept all sorts of false and fanciful beliefs, then that would undermine the presumption that E evidentially supports T. Secondly, if E alone does, in fact, support T, then this is a significant result, one that the non-theist cannot simply ignore. For it would then be incumbent on the non-theist to marshal evidence against T that outweighs the evidence supplied by E.

[25]   See Stephen T. Davis, "What Good Are Theistic Proofs?" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1987), pp. 80–88, reprinted almost verbatim in Davis, *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), ch. 1.

[26]   Condition (1) may also be inadequate, for if it is assumed that an inductive argument is not merely a special kind of deductive argument, then (1) would rule every inductive argument as unsuccessful. To overcome this, formal validity must include, or be supplemented with, some such notion as inductive validity or inductive cogency.

[27]   Davis, "What Good Are Theistic Proofs?" p. 83. Theistic proofs, however, may have a range of functions other than securing the rationality of theistic belief. Consider, for example, the following alternative functions that theistic proofs may have: (a) providing someone with inferential knowledge of the existence of God; (b) augmenting or extending one's pre-existing knowledge of God acquired in a more direct manner; (c) strengthening or confirming one's belief in God, and (d) defending the truth of theistic belief against the objections of non-theists. Each of these functions carries with it different criteria of success for theistic proofs.

[28]   In contrast to Davis, Rowe maintains that a successful theistic proof must consist of premises that are both true and known to be true by at least some people (*The Cosmological Argument*,

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975, pp. 251–55). George Mavrodes, likewise, defines a 'cogent argument' as one which is both sound (i.e., valid with true premises) and known by someone to be sound (*Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*, New York: Random House, 1970, p. 32). Davis, however, opts for the weaker requirement that a successful proof need only employ premises known to be plausible. His justification for doing so is that "there are premises that have not been proved and that may not be known to be true but that, being recognized as at least plausible or rational, can appear as premises in a successful theistic proof" ("What Good Are Theistic Proofs?" p. 83). As an example of such a premise he offers the statement, 'The Greatest Conceivable Being is a possible being', a crucial premise in many versions of the ontological argument. What Davis overlooks, however, is the common criticism that the plausibility of such a statement cannot be recognized on grounds independent of the conclusion (that the Greatest Conceivable Being exists), in which case to accept this statement as a premise in an ontological argument is to commit the fallacy of begging the question. Nevertheless, it seems that the standard of proof demanded by Rowe and Mavrodes is unacceptably high, for it would rule out arguments containing premises that may reasonably believed to be true even though they are not known to be true and not known to be false.

[29]   Davis, "What Good Are Theistic Proofs?" p. 84.

[30]   *Ibid*., p. 83, emphasis his.

[31]   I would suggest that any criteria for determining whether it is reasonable for a proponent *S* of a given argument *A* to accept the premises of *A* would (at least when *S* refers to an intellectually sophisticated adult) include the following condition: *S* has considered various objections to the premises of *A*, finds none to be a good reason for rejecting any of the premises of *A*, and has fulfilled all relevant epistemic duties in the course of her investigation. Some such condition is required so that it is not unduly easy for an argument to pass as a good argument.

[32]   Unfortunately, critics of natural theology have often saddled theistic arguments with such requirements. Michael Sudduth, in his forthcoming book, *The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology*, shows that many Reformed theologians proposed unduly stringent criteria of success for theistic arguments and, not surprisingly, considered such arguments to be failures.

[33]   George Mavrodes explicates and defends his person-relative conception of proof in *Belief in God*, ch. 2. This conception of proof is endorsed by Plantinga, "The Prospects for Natural Theology," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 312; Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 41–46, and C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982), pp. 40–44. On criteria of success for theistic proofs and philosophical arguments in general, see also James F. Ross, *Philosophical Theology* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), ch. 1, and Graham Oppy, "Arguing *about* the *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," *Philo* 5 (2002): 34–61. For an excellent discussion on what counts as a good argument that is largely consistent with the view I am adopting here, see Richard Feldman, "Good Arguments," in Frederick F. Schmitt (ed.), *Socializing Epistemology: The Social Dimensions of Knowledge* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), pp. 159–88.

[34]   These criteria, however, should not lead one to think that arguments are either successful or failures, for the goodness of arguments, like the goodness of people, comes in degrees.

[35]   A very different set of criteria will need to be specified if we are concerned with *dialectical success*, where a dialectically successful argument is one which has the following effect: (a) the argument's intended audience is persuaded to accept the conclusion of the argument or to revise their beliefs, or else (b) the intended audience rejects the argument's premises or reasoning, but does so on the basis of non-rational reasons (e.g., pride, fear) or reasons lacking in epistemic justification or warrant.

It is, of course, a major question as to what kinds of argument are likely to have effects (a) or (b). One suggestion is that an argument will not persuade its audience unless it consists of premises to which the audience is already committed. On the other hand, an argument may have effects (a) or (b) without being formally or informally valid – in fact, depending on one's audience, it may be easier to bring about (a) or (b) by means of an invalid argument!

Although I will not be concerned with the issue of whether Rowe's evidential argument could be dialectically successful, it seems that at least some philosophers (other than Rowe) have found this or similar arguments persuasive (Michael Martin, Bruce Russell, and Michael Tooley are cases in point).

One final point: on my account of what makes for a successful argument, one may propose such an argument even though it fails to convince anybody (including the person proposing the argument). This is as it should be, since an argument's combative value (i.e., its ability to persuade others) must not be conflated with its epistemic value (i.e., its ability to provide someone with good reasons for holding a given belief).

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The aim of this chapter is to set the stage for the various duels and battles to be fought out in the ensuing chapters. The first and perhaps most important step of this stage-setting process is to identify and clarify the conception of God I will be working with when examining the problem of evil. The next step is to provide some necessary background to the problem of evil, in particular some *philosophical* background. This will be provided by means of a discussion of some important concepts and distinctions (e.g., 'good', 'evil', logical problem of evil vs. evidential problem of evil) as well as by looking at the bearing of ethical (and meta-ethical) theory on the problem of evil. A short *historical* background will then follow, concentrating on trends and developments in recent research on the problem of evil within analytic philosophy of religion.

1 ORTHODOX THEISM

Of the various conceptions of Ultimate Reality that have been developed by the major religions of the world or that are regarded as being religious in nature, the present study will only be concerned with that conception endorsed by orthodox theism. To arrive at an adequate understanding of orthodox theism it will be helpful to place it within the context of these competing conceptions of Ultimate Reality. Figure 1 provides an overview of these different conceptions.

By *Ultimate Reality* I have in mind that part of reality that forms the primary focus or concern of some religious community. This Reality may be described in either personal or non-personal terms. For a thing to be a person or person-like it must (a) be conscious and aware of itself as such,

Ultimate Reality

Personal   Non-personal

Theism   Theism   Non-theism

Monotheism   Polytheism   Monotheism   Polytheism   e.g. some
                                                                     forms of
                                                                     Buddhism

e.g.   e.g.   e.g.   e.g.
orthodox   process   ancient Greek   standard
theism   theism   pantheon   pantheism
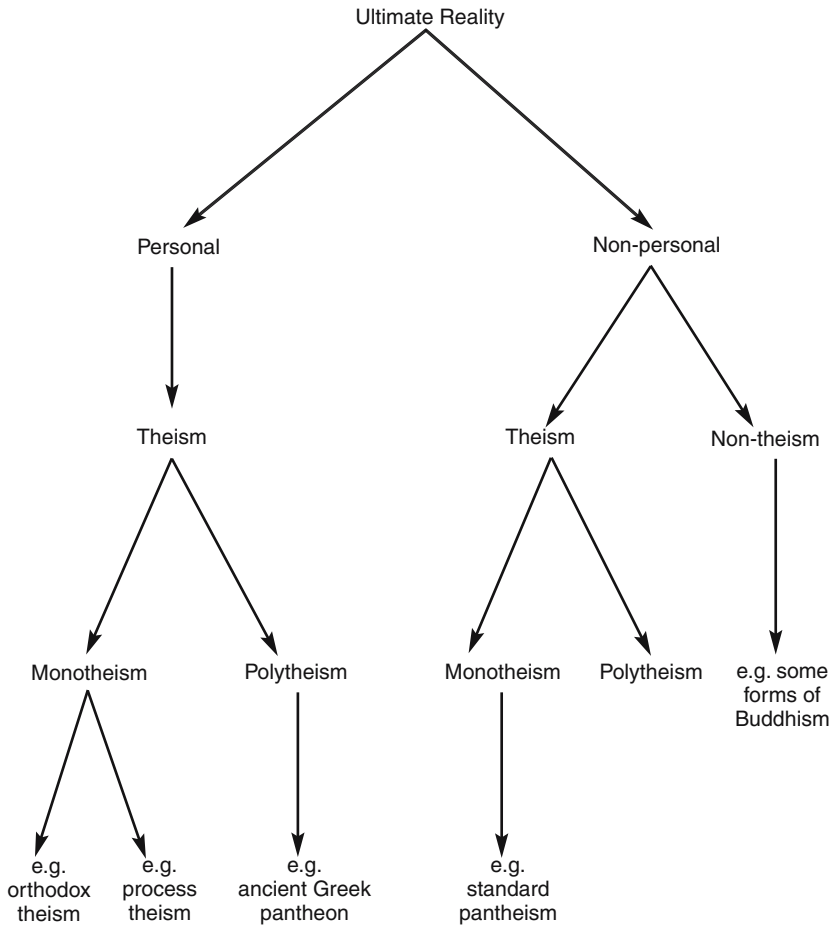
Figure 1.   Competing religious perspectives on the nature of Ultimate Reality.

(b) have a variety of mental states, including conscious beliefs, desires, and intentions, and (c) be capable of acting intentionally.[1] Ultimate Reality may also be divided along theistic and non-theistic lines. But the theism I have in mind here is of a very minimal kind, for it only involves a commitment to the existence of at least one divine being or god. By contrast, non-theistic religious traditions, as exemplified in some schools of Buddhism, reject the existence of any such being.

Theism may be of the personal or the non-personal variety. Personal theism typically consists of the belief that there exists at least one god possessing

the following characteristics:

(a) superhuman powers, or the ability to accomplish feats that are beyond the reach of any human being (for example, predicting what will happen in the distant future, or healing some disease miraculously);

(b) incorporeality or invisibility (though able to be manifested in material form);

(c) immortality, or at least the inability to age and die; and

(d) deserving of reverence and worship, as expressed in such practices as sacrificial offerings and prayer.[2]

But theism, whether it be the personal or the non-personal sort, may be either monotheistic or polytheistic depending on whether Ultimate Reality is conceptualized as a unitary being or a plurality of beings.[3]

Monotheism of the non-personal kind is exemplified best in (canonical) pantheism, according to which the world as a whole is identical with God or, alternatively, everything that exists constitutes a 'unity' and this all-inclusive unity is in some sense divine. The prime example of personal monotheism is the conception of deity that is widely shared by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This version of theism I call *orthodox theism*, to be contrasted with non-orthodox forms of (personal) theism such as process theism and finitism (belief in a finite deity).

According to orthodox theism, there exists just one God, this God being a person or person-like. The operative notion, however, behind this form of theism is that God is *perfect*, where to be perfect is to be *the greatest being possible* or, to borrow Anselm's well-known phrase, *the being than which none greater can be conceived*.[4] Such a conception of God forms the starting-point in what has come to be known as 'perfect being theology'.[5] On this view, one begins with the idea of God as maximally great or absolutely perfect, and then from this conception of deity one deduces all of God's core or essential attributes – that is, those attributes which are constitutive of God's nature, so that he could not at the same time exist and lack any of these attributes. The claim here is that God can only be the greatest being possible in virtue of possessing every great-making quality or perfection to an unlimited degree,[6] where a quality may be said to be great-making insofar as it increases the degree to which the object to which it applies is worthy of worship and moral admiration.[7] But to have all the great-making properties and to have them to an unlimited extent is to possess such attributes as maximal power (omnipotence), maximal knowledge (omniscience), and maximal or perfect goodness, as well as whatever attributes are entailed by these great-making qualities. Thus,

God's essential attributes can be distilled solely from the notion of God as an absolutely perfect being.[8]

The God of orthodox theism, then, may be defined as a being whose essential properties include the following[9]:

(1) *Omnipotence*: This refers to God's ability to bring about any state of affairs that is logically possible in itself as well as logically consistent with his other essential attributes.[10]

(2) *Omniscience*: God is omniscient in that he knows all truths or knows all that is logically possible to know.

(3) *Perfect goodness*: God is the source of moral norms (as in divine command ethics), or always acts either in accordance with moral norms or supererogatorily (i.e., beyond what is required by moral norms).

(4) *Aseity*: God has aseity (literally, being from oneself, *a se esse*) – that is to say, he is self-existent or ontologically independent, for he does not depend either for his existence or for his characteristics on anything outside himself.

(5) *Incorporeality*: God has no body; he is a non-physical spirit but is capable of affecting physical things.[11]

(6) *Eternity*: Traditionally, God is thought to be eternal in an atemporal sense – that is, God is timeless or exists outside of time (a view upheld by Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas). On an alternative view, God's eternality is held to be temporal in nature, so that God is everlasting or exists in time, having infinite temporal duration in both of the two temporal directions.

(7) *Omnipresence*: God is wholly present in all space and time. This is often interpreted metaphorically to mean that God can bring about an event immediately at any place and time, and knows what is happening at every place and time in the same immediate manner.

(8) *Perfect freedom*: God is absolutely free either in the sense that nothing outside him can determine him to perform a particular action, or in the sense that it is always within his power not to do what he does.[12]

(9) *Alone worthy of worship and unconditional commitment*: God, being the greatest being possible, is the only being fit to be worshipped and the only being to whom one may commit one's life without reservation.[13]

The God of traditional theism is also typically accorded a further attribute, one that he is thought to possess only contingently:

(10) *Creator and sustainer of the world*: God brought the (physical and non-physical) world into existence, and also keeps the world and every object within it in existence. Thus, no created thing could exist at a given moment unless it were at that moment held in existence by God. Further, no created thing could have the causal powers and liabilities it has at a given moment unless it were at that moment supplied with those powers and liabilities by God.

According to orthodox theism, God was free not to create a world. In other words, there is at least one possible world in which God creates nothing at all. But then God is a creator only contingently, not necessarily. (However, God is necessarily the creator of any created thing that does exist – that is to say, it is necessarily true that if anything is created then God is responsible for its coming into existence.)[14]

Orthodox theism admits of many variations, some of which involve additions to the properties listed in (1)–(10). Christian theism, for example, adds that God

(11) is a trinity of persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and
(12) became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, led a public ministry in Palestine, and was crucified and resurrected.

Islamic theism, on the other hand, rejects (11) and (12), but adds that God

(13) provided a series of revelations to Muhammad which are faithfully recorded in the Koran and which supersede all previous revelations (including those recorded in the Old and New Testaments) but will not be superseded by any future revelations.

Apart from adding to the original set of properties (1)–(10), different versions of orthodox theism can be generated by offering varying accounts of one or more of the divine attributes. For example, what has recently come to be known as *open theism* (or *free-will theism*) interprets God's omniscience in such a way that it does not include either foreknowledge (or, more specifically, knowledge of what free agents other than God will do) or middle knowledge (i.e., knowledge of what every possible free creature would

freely choose to do in any possible situation in which that creature might find itself).[15] On the other hand, *Molinist theists* (named after the sixteenth-century Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina, who developed the theory of middle knowledge) conceive of divine omniscience as encompassing both foreknowledge and middle knowledge.[16]

But then which variety of orthodox theism is to be chosen as the focus of discussion in the present work? As will be seen in Section 5 of Chapter 5, Rowe takes the target of his evidential argument from evil to be the God of 'restricted standard theism', a version of theism that is roughly equivalent to the conception of God given solely in terms of properties (1)–(10) above (i.e., without any additional properties such as those unique to Christian versions of theism). I will follow the same course with one important qual-ification: I will also consider versions of theism that are likely to be true if bare orthodox theism is true (even though they are not entailed by bare orthodox theism). Thus, when considering Rowe's evidential argument I will take into account conceptions of God stated entirely in terms of prop-erties (1)–(10), but also conceptions that are accompanied by further properties such as 'creator of a heavenly afterlife' and 'creator of a vale of soul-making' (I will return to this matter in Section 5.4 of Chapter 5).

This, of course, still leaves room for a wide range of conflicting con-ceptions of God, as indicated by the foregoing debate between open theists and Molinist theists. And as many have pointed out, the account one gives of the divine properties is likely to influence the range of solutions available in answer to the problem of evil. For instance, it is sometimes thought that the greater the excellences one attributes to God the more difficult one ren-ders the problem of evil (as if it were not difficult enough!). Thus, open the-ists typically think that they have greater resources than Molinist theists to tackle the problem of evil, since Molinists attribute a greater amount of knowledge to God than their counterparts and hence set higher standards of responsibility for God.[17] All this, of course, is hotly contested, and David Hunt has recently provided some good reasons for thinking that the mini-malist theist, operating with a comparatively lean conception of God, need not be better off when attempting to solve the problem of evil.[18] Be that as it may, the fact remains that the particular account of the divine attributes one adopts is likely to impact on the range of objections one can raise in reply to evidential arguments like Rowe's. In the present work, however, I will conduct my assessment of Rowe's case without committing myself to the truth of a particular account of the divine attributes. Therefore, theistic responses to Rowe that rely on a specific account of one of the divine attrib-utes will not be deemed unsatisfactory simply in virtue of relying on such an

account (unless, of course, the account in question appears to be wildly implausible). In this way, I am clearly making the theist's job in answering Rowe much easier than it would otherwise be. However, if Rowe's argument can be successfully defended, the defence will thereby be more appealing, as it will not depend on a specific understanding of the divine attributes.[19]

2   THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Clarifying one's conception of God is but the first step in clarifying the nature of the problem of evil. To arrive at a more complete understanding of this vexing problem, it is necessary to unpack further some of its philosophical baggage. I turn, therefore, to some important concepts and distinctions associated with the problem of evil, before looking at its relationship to ethics and meta-ethics. This philosophical background will then be supplemented by a historical survey of some recent developments in discussions of the problem of evil.

2.1   Philosophical Background

2.1.1   Goods and Evils.   The terms 'good' and 'evil' are, if nothing else, notoriously difficult to define. Some account, however, can be given of these terms as they are employed in discussions of the problem of evil. Beginning with the notion of evil, this is normally given a very wide extension so as to cover everything that is negative and destructive in life. The ambit of evil will therefore include such categories as the bad, the unjust, the immoral, and the painful. An analysis of evil in this broad sense may proceed as follows:

An event may be categorized as evil if it involves any of the following:

(a) some harm (whether it be minor or great) being done to the physical and/or psychological well-being of a sentient creature;
(b) the unjust treatment of some sentient creature;
(c) loss of opportunity resulting from premature death;
(d) anything that prevents an individual from leading a fulfilling and virtuous life;
(e) a person doing that which is morally wrong.

Condition (a) captures what normally falls under the rubric of *pain* as a physical state (e.g., the sensation you feel when you have a toothache or broken jaw) and *suffering* as a mental state in which we wish that our situation were otherwise (e.g., the experience of anxiety or despair).[20] However, pain and suffering thus defined do not take into account the harm sometimes done to one's well-being even when one is unaware of this (e.g., developing cancer while being blissfully ignorant of the damage being done to one's health). Condition (a), therefore, does not make conscious awareness of the harm being done a prerequisite for being a victim of evil. Condition (b) introduces the notion of injustice, so that the prosperity of the wicked, the demise of the virtuous, and the denial of voting rights or employment opportunities to women and blacks would count as evils. The third condition is intended to cover cases of untimely death, that is to say, death not brought about by the ageing process alone.[21] Death of this kind may result in loss of opportunity either in the sense that one is unable to fulfill one's potential, dreams or goals, or merely in the sense that one is prevented from living out the full term of their natural life. This is partly why we consider it a great evil if an infant were killed after impacting with a train at full speed, even if the infant experienced no pain or suffering in the process. Fourth, condition (d) classifies as evil anything that inhibits one from leading a life that is both fulfilling and virtuous – poverty and prostitution would be cases in point. And the final condition relates evil to immoral choices or acts.[22]

Paralleling the above analysis of evil, the following account of 'good' may be offered:

> An event may be categorized as good if it involves any of the following:
>
> (a) some improvement (whether it be minor or great) in the physical and/or psychological well-being of a sentient creature;
> (b) the just treatment of some sentient creature;
> (c) anything that advances the degree of fulfillment and virtue in an individual's life;
> (d) a person doing that which is morally right.

Turning to the many varieties of evil, the following have become standard in the literature and will play an important part in the present study.

Horrendous Evil.   The recent flurry of works on the subject of evil emphasizes that the category of (what I am calling) horrendous evil is intended to pick out not so much something that is very bad or very wrong, but rather something possessing an especially horrific quality.[23] A horrendous evil, then, is not merely an evil that exceeds some quantitative threshold, but is

rather a member of a morally unique class of events that resists assimilation to other evil-kinds such as the painful, the bad, the wrong, the criminal, and the immoral. What exactly, then, is horrendous evil? Perhaps it is best to introduce the concept by way of some examples. Here are a few cases of what we may call 'quintessentially horrendous evil':

- The child abuse stories recounted in Book 5, ch. 4 of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (one of which involves a general setting a pack of vicious dogs onto an eight-year-old boy in front of the boy's mother, merely because the boy inadvertently threw a stone and bruised the leg of the general's favourite beagle);
- The Holocaust of 1939–45, particularly the concentration camps, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka, where millions of people were killed by being worked to death, starved to death, beaten to death, shot, or gassed;
- The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the US in August 1945, with over 200,000 dead as a result by the end of the year, and thousands more in years to come dying or suffering from genetic disorders due to the radiation generated by the bombs;
- Stalin's brutal, dictatorial rule of the Soviet Union during 1928–53, epitomized by the Ukraine famine engineered by Stalin in 1932–33 and the expansive network of labour camps called 'Gulags';
- The serial murders of the 'Green River killer', Gary Ridgway, who in November 2003 pleaded guilty to the murders of forty-eight women, making him America's most prolific convicted serial killer;
- The slow and painful death of young children or people in the prime of their life due to incurable conditions such as leukemia and Huntington's Chorea; and
- The Asian tsunami disaster of December 2004, which left over 200,000 dead and many more homeless.

Without wishing to enter into a detailed analysis of horrendous evil, it may be noted that what seems to ground the horrific quality of the above evils is a process of *dehumanization*. To dehumanize, as the word implies, is to strip another person of their humanity. Israel Charny provides a more comprehensive definition:

> *Dehumanization* is a psychological-symbolic removal of others from the province or group classification of *human*, and thus removes from the others any entitlement to protection or privilege as human beings.[24]

Dehumanization, then, involves pushing others (normally those powerless to respond or retaliate) outside the boundaries of the human community, redefining them as less-than-human and thus not deserving of the protection and dignity due to members of the human species. This element of dehumanization is present in many of the foregoing cases of horrendous evil, above all in the treatment of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis.[25]

Dehumanization, however, may not only involve the removal of the victim's (and the perpetrator's[26]) dignity, but also the eradication of meaning, purpose and value from the victim's life. For example, someone struck by Huntington's Chorea in the midst of a brilliant career as a pianist may feel dehumanized not in the sense that another person has deliberately violated their basic dignity as a human being, but rather in the sense that their suffering has robbed (or threatens to rob) their life of meaning and value. Their participation in horrendous evil affords them with reason to believe that their life is not worth living. This link between horrendous evil and dehumanization as loss of meaning is explicitly made by Marilyn Adams in her definition of horrendous evil, according to which horrendous evils are

> evils the participation in which (that is, the doing or suffering of which) constitutes prima facie reason to doubt whether the participant's life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to him/her on the whole.[27]

Victims of horrendous evil, on this account, are stripped of their hope of happiness and meaning, and in this way are stripped of their very humanity. It is this life-ruining potential that makes horrendous evils so pernicious. Their destructive power, as Adams puts it, "reaches beyond their concrete disvalue (such as the pain and material deprivation they involve), into the deep structure of the person's framework of meaning-making, seemingly to defeat the individual's value as a person, to degrade him/her to subhuman status."[28]

As will be seen in the following chapter, Rowe states his evidential argument in terms of particular instances of horrendous evil, and so the issue to be addressed is what bearing horrendous evil has on the credentials of theistic belief.

A horrendous evil may be either a moral evil or a natural evil. A brief description of these two categories of evil is therefore required.

Moral Evil.   This is evil that results from the misuse of free will on the part of some moral agent in such a way that the agent thereby becomes morally blameworthy for the resultant evil. Moral evil therefore includes specific

acts of intentional wrongdoing such as lying and murdering[29], as well as defects in character such as dishonesty and greed.[30]

Natural Evil.   In contrast to moral evil, natural evil is evil that results from the operation of natural processes, in which case no non-divine agent can be held morally accountable for the resultant evil.[31] Classic examples of natural evil are natural disasters such as cyclones and earthquakes that result in enormous suffering and loss of life, illnesses such as leukemia and Alzheimer's, and disabilities such as blindness and deafness.[32]

An important qualification, however, must be made at this point. A great deal of what normally passes as natural evil is brought about by human wrongdoing or negligence. For example, lung cancer may be caused by heavy smoking; the loss of life occasioned by some earthquakes may be largely due to irresponsible city planners locating their creations on faults that will ultimately heave and split; and some droughts and floods may have been prevented if not for the careless way we have treated our planet. As it is the misuse of free will that has caused these evils or contributed to their occurrence, it seems best to regard them as moral evils and not natural evils. In the present work, therefore, a natural evil will be defined as an evil resulting *solely* or *chiefly* from the operation of the laws of nature. Alternatively, and perhaps more precisely, an evil will be deemed a natural evil only if no non-divine agent can be held morally responsible for its occurrence. Thus, a flood caused by human pollution of the environment will be categorized a natural evil as long as the agents involved could not be held morally responsible for the resultant evil, which would be the case if, for instance, they could not reasonably be expected to have foreseen the consequences of their behaviour.[33]

2.1.2   Versions of the Problem of Evil.   The problem of evil may be described as the problem of reconciling belief in God with the existence of evil.[34] But the problem of evil, like evil itself, has many guises. It may, for example, be expressed either as an *experiential* problem or as a *theoretical* problem. In the former case, the problem is the difficulty of adopting or maintaining an attitude of love and trust toward God when confronted by evil that is deeply perplexing and disturbing. Alvin Plantinga provides an eloquent account of this problem:

The theist may find a *religious* problem in evil; in the presence of his own suffering or that of someone near to him he may find it difficult to

maintain what he takes to be the proper attitude towards God. Faced
with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel
against God, to shake his fist in God's face, or even to give up belief in
God altogether … Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlight-
enment, but for pastoral care.[35]

By contrast, the theoretical problem of evil is the purely 'intellectual' mat-
ter of determining what impact, if any, the existence of evil has on the truth-
value or the epistemic status of theistic belief. To be sure, these two
problems are interconnected – theoretical considerations, for example, may
colour one's actual experience of evil, as happens when suffering that is bet-
ter comprehended becomes easier to bear. In the present work, however, my
focus will be exclusively on the theoretical dimension. This aspect of the
problem of evil comes in two broad varieties: the logical problem and the
evidential problem.

The logical version of the problem of evil (also known as the *a priori*
version and the deductive version) is the problem of removing an alleged
logical inconsistency between certain claims about God and certain claims
about evil. J.L. Mackie provides a succinct statement of this problem:

> In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is
> wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction
> between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true
> the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts
> of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must*
> adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.[36]

In a similar vein, H.J. McCloskey frames the problem of evil as follows:

> Evil is a problem for the theist in that a *contradiction* is involved in the
> fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and per-
> fection of God on the other.[37]

Atheologians like Mackie and McCloskey, in maintaining that the logical
problem of evil provides conclusive evidence against theism, are claiming
that theists are committed to an internally inconsistent set of beliefs and
hence that theism is necessarily false. More precisely, it is claimed that the-
ists commonly accept the following propositions:

(14) God exists
(15) God is omnipotent

(16) God is omniscient
(17) God is perfectly good
(18) Evil exists.

Propositions (14)–(17) form an essential part of the orthodox conception of God, as this has been explicated in Section 1 above. But theists typically believe that the world contains evil. The charge, then, is that this commitment to (18) is somehow incompatible with the theist's commitment to (14)–(17). Of course, (18) can be specified in a number of ways – for example, (18) may refer to the existence of any evil at all, or a certain amount of evil, or particular kinds of evil, or some perplexing distributions of evil. In each case, a different version of the logical problem of evil, and hence a distinct charge of logical incompatibility, will be generated.

   The alleged incompatibility, however, is not obvious or explicit. Rather, the claim is that propositions (14)–(18) are *implicitly contradictory*, where a set *S* of propositions is implicitly contradictory if there is a necessary proposition *p* such that the conjunction of *p* with *S* is a formally contradictory set.[38] Those who advance logical arguments from evil must therefore add one or more necessary truths to the above set of five propositions in order to generate the fatal contradiction. By way of illustration, consider the following additional propositions that may be offered:

(19) A perfectly good being would want to prevent all evils.
(20) An omniscient being knows every way in which evils can come into existence.
(21) An omnipotent being who knows every way in which an evil can come into existence has the power to prevent that evil from coming into existence.
(22) A being who knows every way in which an evil can come into existence, who is able to prevent that evil from coming into existence, and who wants to do so, would prevent the existence of that evil.[39]

From this set of auxiliary propositions, it clearly follows that

(23) If there exists an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being, then no evil exists.

It is not difficult to see how the addition of (19)–(23) to (14)–(18) will yield an explicit contradiction, viz.,

(24) Evil exists and evil does not exist.

If such an argument is sound, theism will not so much lack evidential support, but would rather be, as Mackie puts it, "positively irrational."[40]

The primary focus of this study, however, is **the evidential version of the problem of evil** (also called the *a posteriori* version and the inductive version) which seeks to show that the existence evil, although logically consistent with the existence of God, counts against the truth of theism. As with the logical problem, evidential formulations may be based on the sheer existence of evil, or certain instances, types, amounts, or distributions of evil.[41]

Evil can be said to *count against* theism insofar as evil lowers the probability that God exists (though the probability value of 'God exists' need not be reduced to less than 0.5). But if evil counts against theism in this way, then evil constitutes *evidence* against the existence of God. Evidential arguments, therefore, claim that there are certain facts about evil that cannot be adequately explained on a theistic account of the world. Theism is thus treated as a large-scale hypothesis or explanatory theory which aims to make sense of some pertinent facts, and to the extent that it fails to do so it is disconfirmed.[42]

In evidential arguments, however, the evidence only probabilifies its conclusion, rather than conclusively verifying it. The probabilistic nature of such arguments usually (thought not always) manifests itself in the form of a premise to the effect that 'It is probably the case that some instance (or type, or amount, or pattern) of evil *E* is gratuitous'.[43] This probability judgment, in turn, usually rests on the claim that, even after careful reflection, we can see no good reason for God's permission of *E*. The inference from this claim to the judgment that there exists gratuitous evil is inductive in nature, and it is inductive steps of this sort that set the evidential argument apart from the logical argument.[44]

2.1.3 Ethical Theory and the Problem of Evil. The problem of evil is intimately tied to ethics, and two assumptions will be made in the present study in relation to ethical theory, each of which has an important bearing on the problem of evil. The first of these assumptions may be put as follows:

> One who accepts either a divine command theory of ethics or non-realism in ethics is in no position to raise the problem of evil (where 'to be in a position to raise the problem of evil' is to be able to offer the existence of evil as at least a *prima facie* good reason for rejecting theism).

Beginning with the divine command theory, this is the view that an action is right (or wrong) because God commands (or prohibits) it, as opposed to

the view that God commands an action because it is right. Thus, divine command theorists take morality to be dependent upon the will of God. This dependence relation may be spelt out in a number of ways: Robert Adams, for example, originally construed it in meaning-theoretic terms (so that the statement 'x is ethically wrong' just means 'x is contrary to the will of God')[45], whereas Quinn suggests that the relation be thought of in causal terms (in which case God brings about or creates moral obligations by means of his legislative activity).[46] The essential idea, however, is that "an action or kind of action is right or wrong if and only if and *because* it is commanded or forbidden by God, or, in other words, that what ultimately *makes* an action right or wrong is its being commanded or forbidden by God and nothing else."[47]

Such an ethical theory, however, immediately dissolves the problem of evil. Consider, for example, the attempts of a non-theist to establish the non-existence of God by means of an argument from evil. Such arguments typically include a premise to the effect that some evil or other is found in the world. This premise, in the hands of the divine command theorist, would receive the following translation: There are things that happen in the world that are not in accord with the will of God. But then the non-theist presupposes that which she intends to refute, viz., the existence of God. There is no way, then, for an atheological argument from evil to get off the ground.[48] To avoid this unwelcome consequence, I will assume that divine command theories are indefensible.[49]

Moving on to non-realism in ethics, this is the thesis that ethical statements do not correspond to objective reality and hence fail to express any objective truths. This thesis may take at least three forms: (1) *moral relativism*: moral judgments are only true relative to the customs or ideals of a particular society or culture; (2) *moral subjectivism*: moral judgments do not express facts but only one's personal feelings or attitudes; and (3) *moral nihilism*: all moral judgments are false, and hence ordinary thought and speech about ethics, since it presupposes that there are objective moral values, presents an erroneous picture of the world.[50] These meta-ethical positions prevent one from raising the problem of evil in at least two ways. (In support of this I only make reference to subjectivism, though I take it that the arguments can be extended without much difficulty to the cases of moral relativism and moral nihilism.)

First, if subjectivism is true there is no guarantee that expressions like 'x is good' will pick out a unique (one and only one) object. Given that the same thing can be approved of by one person and disapproved of by another, subjectivism allows for the possibility that what is morally good varies from person to person. In that case, statements such as 'x is good' and

'*x* is perfectly good' may be satisfied by any number of objects. But if the-
ism is true, the expression '*x* is perfectly good' can only be satisfied by one
object, viz., God. Thus, if subjectivism is true theism must be false, and
hence the question is begged from the outset against theism.[51]

Second, consider the subjectivist treatment of the following premise
sometimes found in arguments from evil:

> (25) If there were a perfectly good God, he would want a world with no
>   evil in it.

> On a subjectivist reading, (25) amounts to the claim that

> (26) If there were a being of whom I completely approved, that being would
>   want a world that does not contain anything that I disapprove of.

Ordinarily, (25) is thought to express a moral fact – in particular, a fact
about moral goodness. For the subjectivist, however, (25) is to be under-
stood in terms of (26) and so (25) only expresses a fact about the speaker's
mental state – specifically, the speaker would not completely approve of any
being unless that being would want the world to be a certain way. But since
(26) merely records the attitudes and feelings of the speaker, how could
such a premise figure in an argument for atheism that is even remotely plau-
sible? Perhaps (26) could be used to show that there is no God of whom the
subjectivist completely approves. But why should the theist disagree with
that? The question therefore remains whether the God approved of by the
theist exists. And it is difficult to see how an argument from evil based on
(26) could settle this question, since the feelings or desires of the subjec-
tivist and those of the theist are likely to diverge to the extent that a premise
like (26) would be endorsed by the former but not by the latter.[52]

It will therefore be assumed in the chapters to follow that no non-realist
ethical theory is correct. Obviously, if this assumption is true, then some
particular realist ethical theory must be correct. I will not, however, commit
myself to any particular form of meta-ethical realism in discussing the prob-
lem of evil.[53]

The second key assumption made in the present work relates to norma-
tive ethics rather than meta-ethics:

> Arguments from evil, especially Rowe's evidential argument, can be
> stated in such a way as to be neutral with respect to the truth of some
> specific normative ethical theory – for example, consequentialism, ego-
> ism, deontology, virtue theory.

Arguments from evil are often thought of as presupposing the truth of consequentialism[54], but as I will point out later (in Chapter 12, Section 4.1), this view is mistaken. Indeed, I will assume that arguments from evil – or at least Rowe's evidential argument examined here – can be made consistent with most positions in normative ethics. Thus, my strategy will not be to look at Rowe's case for atheism solely from the perspective of one position in normative ethics, but to consider Rowe's case from various ethical positions as well as from vantage-points that are not (directly, at least) dependent on a specific position in normative ethics.[55]

2.2 Historical Background

The problem of evil is an ancient one. Following Hume, it may be traced at least as far back as Epicurus' famous 'trilemma':

> Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent? Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?[56]

This challenge received much attention in the pre-Christian, early Christian, and medieval worlds, but here I can only say something about its attempted resolution in the modern period, specifically the post-WWII period.[57] I will, further, confine myself to developments within the analytic tradition, without implying however that the so-called Continental tradition has not produced much of merit in this field.[58]

In the years immediately following WWII, philosophy of religion, like most branches of philosophy, was heavily preoccupied with matters of language and meaning.[59] Even during this period, however, some philosophers were not so much concerned with the meaningfulness of religious beliefs as with their truth or falsity. Two prime examples are J.L. Mackie and H.J. McCloskey, both of whom attempted to establish the falsity of theism on the basis of the logical problem of evil.[60] The arguments of Mackie and McCloskey provoked various responses, but the most influential was that developed by Alvin Plantinga in a series of writings beginning with his 1965 paper, "The Free Will Defence."[61] Plantinga's aim, however, was not only to expose the flaws in some formulations of the logical argument, but to also put forward an argument of his own in demonstration of the logical compatibility of God and evil. To this end, he constructed his well-known free will defence, the heart of which is the claim that it is possible that it was not within God's power to create a world containing moral good and no moral evil. Although Plantinga's defence failed to persuade critics like

Mackie and Flew, it is now widely considered to be a strong and effective response to the logical problem of evil.[62]

From as early as 1970, however, it became apparent that Plantinga's project of establishing the logical possibility that both God and evil exist evades what is often felt to be the most important aspect of the problem of evil – viz., the explanatory adequacy of theism in the face of evil. George Mavrodes, for example, pointed out that Plantinga's case can be considered satisfactory only if he is not construed as attempting to provide a plausible explanation for God's permission of evil. Mavrodes noted, however, that theism is often accepted because it helps to 'make sense' of one's experience of the world, and so if theism fails to illumine one's experience of evil an important consideration in its favour will have been removed.[63] To be sure, the shift from examining the internal consistency of theism to focusing on the explanatory power of theism had already been made in some earlier studies – in particular, John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love* (1966) and Edward Madden and Peter Hare's *Evil and the Concept of God* (1968), both of which conceive of the problem of evil as the problem of providing a reasonable theistic explanation for the world's evil. But it was not until the late 1970s and the 1980s decade that philosophers turned their attention almost exclusively to arguments from evil that were evidential or inductive in form.

The rise of the evidential problem of evil was marked by the appearance in the late 1970s of several defences of the evidential argument. William Rowe provided his first full-blown defence of the evidential argument in 1978 in the first edition of his textbook, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, and repeated the argument in his classic 1979 paper, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."[64] During the same period, Wesley Salmon and Michael Martin also offered arguments purporting to show that the evidence of evil significantly reduces the likelihood that theism is true.[65] The theistic response to such critics was led by Plantinga's comprehensive assessment of evidential arguments in his 1979 paper, "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil."[66] Plantinga considers personalist, logical, and frequentist theories of probability and concludes that none of these can provide the basis of a good argument in support of the view that the probability of theism, given the amount of evil the actual world contains, is low. Responses such as Plantinga's, however, were criticized for avoiding, once again, the central concerns of theists and non-theists regarding the challenge posed by evil to belief in God. Michael Peterson, in his excellent survey of work published on the problem of evil during this time, expressed this attitude well:

> Ironically, … just as many philosophers had become preoccupied with formal considerations in regard to the logical argument from evil, both

theistic and atheistic philosophers seem to have become inordinately interested in explicating the structure of the evidential argument in terms of the technical machinery of inductive and probabilistic logic … In current discussions of the problem of evil, one wonders when nontheists will be able to articulate a respectable rendition of the evidential argument which does not become entangled in myriad technical considerations and when theists will generate more than minimum defense against their critics.[67]

Peterson's call for a more rounded discussion of the issues involved in the evidential problem was well and truly answered in the 1980s and 1990s. Non-theists such as Rowe and Martin continued to defend and refine their respective versions of the evidential argument, while atheologians such as Bruce Russell, Paul Draper, and Michael Tooley joined the fray with evidential arguments of their own.[68] But the most important developments came from the theistic camp. First, systematic attempts were made to resolve the evidential problem by developing global theodicies or comprehensive explanations for God's permission of evil. Cases in point are the theodicies constructed by Bruce Reichenbach in *Evil and a Good God* (1982), David Ray Griffin in *Evil Revisited* (1991) and, especially, Richard Swinburne in *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998).[69] Second, a 'sceptical theist' response to the evidential argument began to take hold, attacking the atheologians' assumption that we should expect to have access to God's reasons for permitting evil. This line of response was vigorously defended and criticized by contributors to Daniel Howard-Snyder's 1996 collection, *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, and continues to enjoy the patronage of a large percentage of theists today.

Having provided a brief philosophical and historical introduction to the problem of evil, it is time now to examine one very influential formulation of this problem – viz., that provided by William Rowe. The next chapter will outline Rowe's program of defending atheism by means of an appeal to the evidential problem of evil, while the subsequent chapters will determine whether Rowe has managed to successfully carry out this program.

NOTES

[1]   Although some may dispute this account of personhood, it does seem to be a widespread view, particularly amongst traditional theists.

[2]   These conditions should be treated as sufficient, but not necessary, for a personal being to count as a god. Consider, for example, condition (c). In ancient Egyptian religion, most gods were

thought to be subject to old age, death, rebirth, and even total extinction at the end of time – see Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, trans. John Baines (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982 [originally published in German in 1971]), pp. 151–65. Consider, also, condition (d). If, as some deists believe, God has little concern for the welfare of his creatures, he would not be worthy of reverence and worship. Cf. Swinburne's definition of 'god' in *The Concept of Miracle* (London: Macmillan, 1970, p. 6): "I understand by a god a non-embodied rational agent of great power." This, however, has the unfortunate consequence of turning angels into gods and hence traditional theists into polytheists.

[3]   I have not provided any examples of non-personal polytheism simply because there does not seem to have been any historical instances of this form of polytheism. Polytheism commonly involves belief in personal deities, or at least belief in both personal and non-personal deities (examples of the latter may be deified animals and inanimate objects).

[4]   See Chapter 2 of Anselm's *Proslogion*, in *Saint Anselm: Basic Writings*, 2nd ed., trans. S.W. Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1962), pp. 7–8. To be sure, the idea here is that God does not just happen to be the greatest conceivable being, but that this is a property he has essentially.

[5]   The foremost contemporary defender of perfect being theology is undoubtedly Thomas Morris – see his "Perfect Being Theology," *Noûs* 21 (1987): 19–30; "Introduction" in Morris (ed.), *The Concept of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 6–10; *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), ch. 1; and *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), esp. ch. 2. See also George N. Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-time Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), ch. 1, esp. pp. 16–21; Katherin A. Rogers, *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), esp. chs 1 and 2; and Daniel J. Hill, *Divinity and Maximal Greatness* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[6]   This is not entirely accurate. As Schlesinger points out, "God's perfection cannot amount to His having each perfection-making attribute to the highest degree, since the maximization of some desirable qualities is incompatible with the maximization of others. Divine super-excellence is to be understood as the possession of each enhancing attribute to the precise degree required so that in combination they contribute to the maximum sum total of magnificence" (*New Perspectives on Old-time Religion*, p. 1).

[7]   I borrow here from Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 14–16, who take great-making to be a function of worship-worthiness and moral admirability. Morris, on the other hand, suggests that worship-worthiness "can be held to supervene upon, or to consist in, some of the properties ingredient in perfection" ("Perfect Being Theology," p. 24). He then goes on to make perfection or greatness supervenient on intrinsic goodness or value, so that a great-making property is defined as one which is intrinsically good to have, and intrinsic goodness is in turn made a function of metaphysical status or stature ("Perfect Being Theology," p. 26).

[8]   A common criticism of perfect being theology is that it is liable to yield divergent conceptions of God when there is a clash of intuitions over which properties are great-making or over what is and is not a perfection – see Brian Leftow, "God, Concepts of," in E. Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1998), vol. 4, p. 97, and William J. Wainwright, "Worship, Intuitions and Perfect Being Theology," *Noûs* 21 (1987): 31–32. To be fair to Morris, however, he does not think of intuition as an infallible guide in this respect, but rather thinks that our intuitions on these matters may need to be reinforced or corrected by the data of revelation in

conjunction with other methods for arriving at a religiously adequate conception of deity (see Morris, *Our Idea of God*, pp. 41–45). Other criticisms of perfect being theology are addressed by Morris, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm," in *Anselmian Explorations*, pp. 13–25, and Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-time Religion*, pp. 16–21.

⁹   What follows is only a very brief characterization of some of the divine attributes, as anything more detailed would fall beyond the scope of the present work. Particularly good and refined analyses of the divine attributes can be found in Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), parts II and III; Edward Wierenga, *The Nature of God: An Inquiry into Divine Attributes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (eds), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1997), Articles 27–40, pp. 223–319; and Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, *The Divine Attributes*.

¹⁰   As I have argued elsewhere, God's omnipotence is not to be understood as the ability to do absolutely anything, including that which is logically impossible to do – see my "The Absolutist Theory of Omnipotence," *Sophia* 36 (1997): 55–78.

¹¹   Christian theists, in virtue of their belief in the incarnation of the second member of the Trinity, may need to define incorporeality in some non-standard way. Perhaps something like the following will do: God does not have a body in that he does not require a body in order to affect and learn about the world. Cf. Swinburne, *Is There A God?* p. 10.

¹²   For a good analysis of divine freedom and some of the problems engendered by this notion, see the following publications by Rowe: "Freedom, Divine," in Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 757–62; "Divine Freedom," in Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2003 edition, located at <http://plato.stanford.edu/ archives/sum2003/entries/ divine-freedom/>; and *Can God Be Free?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004).

¹³   This attribute raises some interesting but much neglected questions. For example, what is it to worship another being? And is any being, even a perfect being, ever worthy of worship?

¹⁴   It has been questioned, however, whether the God described here as possessing properties (1)–(10) can plausibly be identified with the God revealed in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As Michael Tooley points out, the God of these religions does not seem to be perfectly good. The Christian God, for example, consigns most of the human race to an afterlife of torment in hell (see Mt 7: 13–14, 22:13–14, 25: 41, and 25: 46), while the Islamic God (Allah) exhorts his faithful to "slay the idolaters wherever you find them" (sura 9.5 of the Koran). See section 1.2 of Tooley's "Opening Statement," in Michael Tooley and Alvin Plantinga, *Knowledge of God* (draft ms., to be published in Blackwell's Great Debates in Philosophy series) Great Debates in Philosophy series, due to be published by Blackwell in June 2005. This is clearly an important problem, but one that is rarely addressed by proponents of Judeo-Christian and Islamic theism. In any case, it is only the God of perfect being theology (whether or not this deity can be identified with the God of the Abrahamic faiths) that interests me here, for it is widely assumed that only this God is worthy of worship.

I may also point out that what I am here calling 'orthodox theism' is not to be confused with that version of theism dubbed by process theologians as 'classical theism' (which they contrast to their 'neo-classical theism'). Classical theism, as the name suggests, is the form of theism that became the Christian orthodoxy during the medieval period and was advocated by such theologians as Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. The distinguishing feature of this version of theism is its conception of God as immutable (unable to undergo change), impassible (unable to be affected by anything), eternal in the timeless sense, and simple (without parts). This conception of deity, however, has fallen out of favour even amongst those who consider themselves 'traditional theists', and so it seems best not to identify classical theism with orthodox theism.

[15]   On open theism, see the movement's manifesto, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), authored by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. See also Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), esp. ch. 10, and *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God* (London: Routledge, 2004); Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). David Basinger's *The Case for Freewill Theism: A Philosophical Assessment* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) is often considered to be a defence of open theism; but Basinger is there advancing a quite different position, one that is compatible with both divine foreknowledge and middle knowledge (as Basinger acknowledges in ch. 2 of his study).

[16]   See Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge (Part IV of the* Concordia), translated with an Introduction and Notes by Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). The most comprehensive defence of Molinist theism is provided by Thomas Flint, *Divine Providence: The Molinist Account* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), but see also Jonathan L. Kvanvig, *The Possibility of an All-Knowing God* (London: Macmillan, 1986), ch. 4, William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1987), ch. 12, and Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, ch. 5.

Process theism also involves a distinct interpretation of some of the attributes listed in (1)–(10). This is most famously evident in the case of divine omnipotence, which is thought of as 'a persuasive but not coercive agency', thus denying that God has the capacity to unilaterally control something. But process theism also significantly widens the original set of ten attributes that may be predicated of God. This is largely due to process theism's dipolar conception of God, which results in attributing not only such properties as timelessness, necessity, independence, immutability, and impassibility to God (specifically, to God's 'abstract essence'), but also such properties as temporality, contingency, dependency, mutability, and passivity to God (specifically, to God's 'concrete states'). For this reason, process theism is presented in Fig. 1 as an alternative to, and not a version of, orthodox theism. For a clear and concise account of process theism in relation to traditional theism, see David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), ch. 4.

[17]   See, for example, William Hasker, "Providence and Evil: Three Theories," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 91–105, and Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp. 98–101.

[18]   See David P. Hunt, "Evil and Theistic Minimalism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 49 (2001): 133–54. See also Kenneth J. Perszyk, "Molinism and Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 44 (1998): 163–84, where it is argued that Molinism makes theodicy no harder than does open theism. This matter is not to be confused with the far less controversial claim that forms of theism that subscribe to perfect being theology, in comparison with (say) polytheism, are chiefly responsible for rendering the problem of evil a *problem*.

[19]   I may add here that it is assumed in the present study that the properties listed in (1)–(10), interpreted in any of the standard ways, are compossible – that is to say, it is logically possible for someone to possess these properties all at once.

[20]   Cf. John Hick's discussion of pain and suffering in *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1977), pp. 292–97, 318–22.

[21]   The notion of 'premature death' is admittedly vague, but it should exclude cases where someone very advanced in age chooses to take their own life. Cf. Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 27.

22   A further, historically important conception of evil is the idea of evil as *privatio boni*. This view, prominent in Augustine and Aquinas, holds that evil is not a substance or entity in its own right, but is the absence or lack of some good power or quality which a thing by its nature ought to possess.

23   A brief note regarding terminology. 'Evil', as this notion is usually understood in discussions on the problem of evil within the philosophy of religion, has a very wide significance that does not (though perhaps at one time did) comport with the current, everyday use of 'evil' by English speakers. In the context of the problem of evil, 'evil' signifies, as Marilyn Adams puts it, "all of life's minuses" – from toothaches and twisted ankles to wars and earthquakes (see Adams, "Evil, Problem of," in Edward Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 466). In ordinary discourse, however, 'evil' is reserved for a particular group of "life's minuses", viz., that group that has come to be known (particularly through the writings of Marilyn Adams) as 'horrendous evil'. Thus, the recent resurgence in the study of evil is exclusively concerned with what philosophers of religion call 'horrendous evil'.

Typical of this resurgence is the recent appearance of the website <www.wickedness.net> which promotes inter-disciplinary studies (including conferences and publications) on issues surrounding evil and human wickedness. Also recently, some journals have released special issues devoted to the topic of evil – see, in particular, *The Monist*, vol. 85, no. 2, April 2002, and *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 18, nos 1 and 2, Winter and Spring 2003. Finally, another interesting recent exploration of evil is Adam Morton's *On Evil* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

24   Israel W. Charny, "Dehumanization – 'Killing' the Humanity of Another," in Charny (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Genocide*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), p. 155, emphases his.

25   The dehumanization of the Jews took a variety of forms. For example, the Nazis developed impersonal ways of talking about their victims, particularly by eliminating their names and substituting numbers. Jews were also divided from other members of society by, for example, being forced to wear the yellow star; they were stereotyped in hostile ways; they were likened to animals, or to disease-bearing creatures, or to disease itself; they were humiliated and mocked in countless ways and made subject to what Jonathan Glover has aptly termed "the cold joke" – a cruel display of power over the victims done in jocular fashion (see Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1999, pp. 340–42). The concentration camps, however, remind us that this process of dehumanization reaches its ultimate expression in the physical removal of the other's life. Indeed, as Charny points out, "Once a human being is regarded as so inferior as to be subhuman or not human, he or she becomes prey to being reduced to nonexistence" ("Dehumanization," p. 155).

26   That the process of dehumanization extends beyond the victims to include the perpetrators as well is clear from the case of the Holocaust. The Nazi death camps, as Marilyn Adams points out, aimed to "dehumanize their victims, treating them worse than cattle to break down their personalities and reduce their social instincts to raw animal aggression and self-preservation" (*Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, p. 27). However, Adams does not fail to notice that "organizing and running such institutions also degraded the Nazis, who caricatured human nature by using their finest powers the more imaginatively to transgress the bounds of human decency" (*ibid*.).

The evil of regimes like those of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, and the ideology they embodied, essentially lay in their attempt to invert or annihilate what Stephen de Wijze has called the "moral landscape", that is to say, "those prerequisite values needed for any civilized attempt to manage conflict and to establish a minimal level of respect and dignity between persons" ("Defining Evil: Insights from the Problem of 'Dirty Hands'," *The Monist* 85 (2002): 221). Thus,

those who led or supported these regimes cannot be regarded merely as bad or immoral people. It would be more suitable to regard them as 'moral write-offs', for they removed themselves from the moral community and entered a forbidden 'moral zone', a kind of moral wasteland from which return, if at all possible, is extremely difficult. Daniel Haybron illustrates this well in his portrait of the evil person:

> The evil person is beyond ordinary moral criticism and dialogue: he has no better nature to which we can appeal. Morality has no significant foothold in him … He understands morality, and may be perfectly capable of moral decency, but he rarely if ever exercises this capacity. Because of this, the evil person is also beyond society: a moral exile. No one can expect good from her, or engage in genuine friendship with or expect love from her … The evil person is something of an alien, lying somewhere between the human and demonic. We call her, not coincidentally, a *monster*. (Haybron, "Moral Monsters and Saints," *The Monist* 85 (2002): 277, emphasis his.)

In cases of horrendous evil, then, we shudder not only at what has become of the victim, but also at what has become of the perpetrator. (Note that the adjective 'horrendous' has its roots in the Latin *horrēre*, meaning 'to tremble, shiver, or shudder'.)

[27]   Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, p. 26.

[28]   *Ibid*., pp. 26–27. Jerry Walls also draws attention to the capacity of horrendous evil, or what he calls 'irredeemable' evil, to destroy the very things that make life meaningful – see his *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 115–16.

[29]   To be sure, moral evil encompasses not only *the execution of a wrongful intention and the consequences that follow*, but also *wrongful acts of intention formation*, such as forming the intention to murder someone (whether or not the intention is acted upon).

[30]   A type of moral evil that has not received much attention is *social evil*, or evil that is ingrained in the institutions or practices of a society. Examples include the disparity between the poor and the affluent in western countries, apartheid, slavery, and totalitarian regimes. See Philip L. Quinn, "Social Evil: A Response to Adams," *Philosophical Studies* 69 (1993): 187–94.

[31]   The class of non-divine agents is the class of all agents other than God, and so includes both humans and angels.

[32]   The distinction between moral evil and natural evil is drawn in a similar way by such writers as H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960): 98–100; Edward Madden and Peter Hare, *Evil and the Concept of God* (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), p. 6; Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 30; John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed., pp. 12–13; and William Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001), p. 104. A slightly different way of drawing this distinction is proposed by Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 4–5.

[33]   Given that the notion of horrendous evil cuts across the moral evil/natural evil divide, in cases of horrendous *natural* evil we might replace talk of 'dehumanization' with talk of 'devaluation'.

[34]   What I have described here is part of what may be called 'the religious problem of evil', which also admits of non-theistic versions of the problem of evil such as those arising in some Eastern religious traditions. For a critical discussion of one popular solution (in terms of the doctrine of karma) to the non-theistic problem of evil in Indian religious thought, see Whitley R.P. Kaufman, "Karma, Rebirth, and the Problem of Evil," *Philosophy East & West* 55 (2005): 15–32. The religious problem of evil may be contrasted with 'the secular problem of evil', this being the problem of explaining or understanding evil from a purely naturalistic framework.

The notion of a 'secular problem of evil' seems to have been introduced by Peter Kivy, "Melville's *Billy* and the Secular Problem of Evil: The Worm in the Bud," *Monist* 63 (1980): 480–93.

[35] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 63–64, emphasis his. For a discussion of the experiential or religious problem, see John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), chs 13 and 14. The struggle to maintain religious faith in the face of personal tragedy is depicted with great poignancy in C.S. Lewis' classic *A Grief Observed* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966 [originally published in 1961]). The experiential problem is not to be confused with what Kenneth Surin has called 'the practical problem of evil', which relates to what can be done to combat evil in the world – see Surin's *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 60.

[36] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955): 200, emphases his.

[37] McCloskey, "God and Evil," p. 97, emphasis mine. Michael Tooley, however, has argued that Mackie and McCloskey have been incorrectly interpreted as advocates of the logical argument from evil ("Alvin Plantinga and the Argument from Evil," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1980): 361–63). But see Plantinga's response to Tooley in "Tooley and Evil: A Reply," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1981): 72–74.

[38] *S* is *formally contradictory* just in case an explicit contradiction can be deduced from its member propositions solely by the operation of the laws of formal logic; and a proposition is *explicitly contradictory* just in case it is a conjunctive proposition in which one conjunct is the denial of the other conjunct – for example, 'It is true that Socrates is mortal and it is false that Socrates is mortal'. These notions are clearly explicated in Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), pp. 19–22.

[39] This set of additional propositions is suggested by Michael Tooley in Section 3.1 of his "Opening Statement," in Tooley and Plantinga, *Knowledge of God*. As is well known, a similar set of auxiliary propositions was proposed by Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," pp. 200–01.

[40] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," p. 200. In responding to the logical problem of evil, theists have tended to question whether the auxiliary propositions specified by the atheologian are necessarily true or essential to theism. Another common response has involved the construction of a *defence*, the aim of which is to show that propositions (14)–(18) are mutually consistent by showing that there is a possible world in which (14)–(18) are true. The notion of a defence is usually contrasted with the notion of a *theodicy*, which refers to a plausible explanation for God's permission of evil. On these two notions, see Chapter 9, Section 3.

[41] Cf. the taxonomy of problems of evil provided by Terry Christlieb, *Theism and Evil: Consistency, Evidence, and Completeness* (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1988), ch. 1; Bruce Russell, "Defenseless," in Daniel Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 194; Michael Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, pp. 23–27, 69–72; Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil," Sections 1.2–1.4; and Sections 3.1–3.4 of Tooley's "Opening Statement" in Tooley and Plantinga, *Knowledge of God*.

[42] On the nature of the reasoning involved in evidential arguments, see Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 59–66. As Tooley points out (in "The Problem of Evil," Section 3.1), evidential arguments may be classified according to whether they employ a *direct inductive approach*, which aims at showing that theism is unlikely to be true without comparing theism to some alternative hypothesis, or an *indirect inductive approach*, which attempts to show that theism is unlikely to be true by identifying an alternative hypothesis that explains far more adequately some significant set

of facts about evil than does the theistic hypothesis. The former strategy is employed by Rowe, while the latter strategy is exemplified best in Paul Draper's "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists". The indirect approach, furthermore, involves an explicit appeal to theism's comparative lack of explanatory power, whereas the notion of explanation or explanatory adequacy is often implicit or further in the background in the direct approach.

43   I add the qualification 'though not always' in order to take account of those evidential arguments which do not employ any premise to the effect that some evil is probably gratuitous. Such arguments include Draper's evidential argument and the argument developed by J.L. Schellenberg in "Stalemate and Strategy: Rethinking the Evidential Argument from Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 37 (2000): 405–19.

44   Cf. Daniel Howard-Snyder's proposal for distinguishing evidential arguments from logical arguments:

[W]e can think of a "logical argument from evil" as one which has a premise that says God and some *known* fact about evil are *incompatible,* and we can think of an "evidential argument from evil" as one that *lacks* such a premise. That is, we should expect that paradigm members of the evidential family will either (i) entirely lack a premise that says that God is incompatible with some fact about evil, or (ii) if they have such a premise, the putative fact about evil cannot be known with certainty, for example, it might be claimed to be probable to some significant degree, or reasonably believed. ("Introduction," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p.xiv, emphases his.)

45   This is the kind of divine command theory advocated by Adams in "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness," in Gene Outka and John P. Reeder, Jr. (eds), *Religion and Morality: A Collection of Essays* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973), pp. 318–47. Adams subsequently revised his theory so that the identity between ethical wrongness and contrariety with the commands of God is now held to express a metaphysical necessity, but not an analytic or *a priori* truth – see Adams, "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 7 (1979): 66–79. Both papers are collected in Adams' *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), chs 7 and 9.

46   See Philip L. Quinn, "Divine Command Ethics: A Causal Theory," in Janine M. Idziak (ed.), *Divine Command Morality: Historical and Contemporary Readings* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), pp. 305–25. For further defences of divine command theory, see Quinn, *Divine Commands and Moral Requirements* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978); Wierenga, *The Nature of God*, ch. 8; Richard J. Mouw, *The God Who Commands* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); and Paul Rooney, *Divine Command Morality* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996).

47   William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 28, emphases his.

48   A view of this sort is defended by Patterson Brown, "God and the Good," *Religious Studies* 2 (1967): 269–76.

49   It is peculiar, to say the least, that prominent divine command theorists like Robert Adams and Philip Quinn, even when discussing the problem of evil, fail to consider the impact of their meta-ethics on the problem of evil.

50   This is, of course, J.L. Mackie's 'error theory' of ethics as presented in his *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977). The three categories listed above are taken from Mark Nelson, "Naturalistic Ethics and the Argument from Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 8 (1991): 372–74, though he takes each of these as a species of ethical naturalism.

[51]   Of course, in the case of moral nihilism the problem is not that '*x* is perfectly good' fails to pick out just one object, but that it fails to pick out any object at all.

[52]   Similar attitudes have been expressed by Charles F. Kielkopf, "Emotivism as the Solution to the Problem of Evil," *Sophia* 9 (1970): 34–38; James T. King, "The Meta-Ethical Dimension of the Problem of Evil," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 5 (1971): 174–78; Larry Hitterdale, "The Problem of Evil and the Subjectivity of Values Are Incompatible," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 18 (1978): 467–69; Nelson, "Naturalistic Ethics," pp. 374–75; and Graham Oppy, "Is God Good By Definition?" *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 467–74. As Nelson shows, the relativist and the nihilist are in the same boat as the subjectivist. For according to moral relativism, (25) is to be interpreted as follows:

> If there were a God who is perfectly good according to culture *C*, he would want a world with nothing that is evil according to *C*.

At best, an argument from evil employing this premise would only establish that there is no God who is wholly good as goodness is defined by some community, *C*. But theists who do not accept the moral standards of *C* need not be perturbed by such an argument. As for the moral nihilist, she would regard (25) – like any other moral judgment – as false. The moral nihilist is therefore incapable, in principle, of formulating a sound argument from evil. This is not to say, however, that atheologians such as David Hume, Bertrand Russell and J.L. Mackie, all of whom supported non-realism in ethics, were contradicting their own meta-ethics when raising arguments from evil – at least if their aim was only to show up a contradiction in the theist's set of beliefs. But see Nicholas Sturgeon's "Evil and Explanation," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* suppl. vol. 21 (1995): 155–85, where it is convincingly shown that Mackie is not arguing solely in an *ad hominem* fashion, employing his opponent's (i.e., the theist's) evaluative standards.

[53]   It worth noting that the particular brand of meta-ethical realism espoused by Rowe is intuitionism, the view that the truth of certain moral propositions can be known directly by intuition. Further, Rowe follows Moore in holding that it is general or abstract principles that are intuited (e.g., suffering is intrinsically bad), rather than concrete or specific truths (e.g., this particular act is morally wrong). (Personal communication from Rowe, June 26, 2003.)

[54]   See, for example, Eric Reitan, "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 306–19.

[55]   It must be admitted, however, that the adoption of a particular theory in normative ethics may render the problem of evil easier or harder, or at least delimit the range of solutions available. For an excellent account of the problems faced by theodicists when the ethical framework is restricted to deontology, see David McNaughton, "The Problem of Evil: A Deontological Perspective," in Alan G. Padgett (ed.), *Reason and the Christian Religion: Essays in Honour of Richard Swinburne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 329–51.

[56]   Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell (London: Penguin, 1990 [originally published in 1779]), Part X, pp. 108–109. Mark Larrimore, however, suggests that ancient sceptics such as Carneades (214–129 BCE), rather than Epicurus (341–270 BCE), first formulated this trilemma – see his "Introduction: Responding to Evils," in Larrimore (ed.), *The Problem of Evil: A Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp. xviii–xxi.

[57]   Excellent accounts of the pre-modern history of the problem of evil can be found in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), Part II; Larrimore, *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*; and Joseph F. Kelly, *The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition from the Book of Job to Modern Genetics* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2002).

[58]   For a taste of the Continental perspective on the problem of evil, see Emmanuel Levinas, "Useless Suffering," trans. Richard Cohen, in Robert Bernasconi and David Wood (eds), *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 156–65; Paul Ricoeur, "Evil, a Challenge to Philosophy and Theology," in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 249–61; and Sarah K. Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002).

[59]   This is clearly evidenced by the influential collection, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press, 1955), where the issue of the meaningfulness of religious discourse loomed large. For the history of philosophy of religion in the post-war period, see Alan P.F. Sell, *The Philosophy of Religion, 1875–1980* (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1996 [originally published in 1988]), chs 6–8, and Eugene Thomas Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion, 1900–2000* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), Parts 3 and 4.

[60]   See J.L. Mackie's 1955 paper, "Evil and Omnipotence," and H.J. McCloskey's 1960 paper, "God and Evil." McCloskey subsequently provided a more thorough defence of atheism based on the problem of evil in *God and Evil* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

[61]   See Plantinga, "The Free Will Defence," in Max Black (ed.), *Philosophy in America* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), pp. 204–20. See also Plantinga's *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), ch. 6. Plantinga later expanded and refined his free will defence in *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164–93.

[62]   Flew responds to Plantinga in "Compatibilism, Free Will and God," *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 231–44, while Mackie's response occurs in *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), pp. 162–76. The following comment from Robert Adams is typical of the current assessment of the logical problem of evil: "I think it is fair to say that Plantinga has solved this problem. That is, he has argued convincingly for the consistency of (1) [God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good] and (2) [There is evil in the world]" ("Plantinga on the Problem of Evil," in James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds), *Alvin Plantinga*, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985, p. 226).

[63]   See Mavrodes, "Some Recent Philosophical Theology," *Review of Metaphysics* 14 (1970): 103–08.

[64]   The development of Rowe's thinking on the evidential argument will be outlined in full in the following chapter.

[65]   See Wesley C. Salmon, "Religion and Science: A New Look at Hume's *Dialogues*," *Philosophical Studies* 33 (1978): 143–76, and Michael Martin, "Is Evil Evidence Against the Existence of God?" *Mind* 87 (1978): 429–32.

[66]   See Plantinga, "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979): 1–53.

[67]   Peterson, "Recent Work on the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 326–27. For another, and much broader, survey of recent work on the problem of evil, see Barry Whitney, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

[68]   See Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990), esp. ch. 14; Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 121–39; Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists"; and Michael Tooley, "The Argument from Evil."

[69]   See Bruce R. Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982); David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991); and Richard Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). An invaluable sourcebook for publications on the subject of theodicy from 1960 to 1990 is Barry Whitney's *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil, 1960–90*.

3. ROWE'S EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

For nearly thirty years, William Rowe has been articulating, defending and refining the evidential argument from evil – the argument that the presence of evil in the world inductively supports or makes likely the claim that the theistic God does not exist. His argument has received much attention since its formal inception in 1978, for it is often considered to be the most cogent presentation of the evidential problem of evil. James Sennett, for example, views Rowe's argument as "the clearest, most easily understood, and most intuitively appealing of those available."[1] Terry Christlieb, likewise, thinks of Rowe's argument as "the strongest sort of evidential argument, the sort that has the best chance of success."[2] In the present chapter, I aim to outline the development of Rowe's thinking on the evidential argument from his earliest writings on this subject till his most recent. Three distinct periods in his work will be identified, each represented by a specific formulation of the evidential argument.

1   THE EARLY ROWE (1978–86)

Rowe's early period begins in 1978 with the publication of *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, where a sustained attempt is made for the first time at putting forward and defending a version of the evidential argument from evil. This was not, however, the first expression in print of Rowe's thinking on the evidential argument. Prior to 1978, Rowe briefly touched on the evidential argument in two papers.

The first of these papers was a 1969 review of Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds*.[3] In his discussion of the problem of evil, Rowe maintains

that Plantinga has convincingly refuted the claim that the following three propositions constitute an *inconsistent* set:

  (a) God exists
  (b) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good
  (c) Evil exists.

However, it may be argued that, although it is logically possible for (a)–(c) to be true, as *a matter of fact* not all of (a), (b), and (c) are true, and this in Rowe's opinion is a "more plausible" claim.[4] Rowe adds that in order to defend this claim it would suffice to put forward further propositions (including contingent ones) that are known to be true and that, in conjunction with (a)–(c), form an inconsistent set. Two such propositions are the following:

  (d) An omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being would prevent the occurrence of any evil that is not necessary for a greater good.
  (e) There exist cases of severe, protracted, and involuntary human pain which are not necessary for any greater good.

Proposition (d) is accepted as a necessary truth by many theists. But if we add (e) to (a)–(d), then a contradiction is derivable. (e), of course, is not a necessary truth and would be rejected by the theist. Rowe, however, states the following in relation to (e):

> I believe that (e) is true. But I must confess that I don't know how to prove that (e) is true or how to show that someone is unreasonable if he believes that (e) is false.[5]

At this point, then, Rowe accepts the evidential argument but has no way of defending it or showing that it is sound. He notes that Plantinga also concludes that the theist and nontheist reach an impasse with regards to (e) and that reasonable people may hold diverging views on such propositions. Despite feeling uneasy about Plantinga's conclusion, he "cannot now see what, if anything, is wrong with it."[6]

  By 1973, however, Rowe had begun to develop a defence of (e), albeit in a quite rudimentary form. This is evidenced by the abstract published in *The Journal of Philosophy* as "Plantinga on Possible Worlds and Evil," this being a summary of a paper Rowe was to deliver later in the year at a symposium on God and possible worlds.[7] Rowe argues here that "the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps logically consistent

with the existence of the theistic God, provides us with rational grounds for atheism."[8] As an example in support of his case, he cites the evils brought about by Hitler. There are, he writes, possible worlds quite similar to ours but which do not contain Hitler or any other "moral monsters" inhabiting our world. Such worlds are clearly better than the actual world. One may object that it is logically possible that any world created by God but lacking Hitler would have turned out to be no better than our world, for it is logically possible that had Hitler not existed someone else may have used their freedom so as to exceed even Hitler's accomplishments. Although this is logically possible, it remains likely that "the rest of us in our world would not have been appreciably different had our world contained fewer moral monsters."[9] Rowe, therefore, concludes that there are rational grounds for atheism based on the variety and profusion of evil and on our reasonable judgments as to what free agents in our world would have done under slightly different circumstances.

A more elaborate defence of the evidential argument appeared in the 1978 edition of *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, and this argument was to be repeated in significantly expanded form in 1979 in the now classic and widely-anthologized paper, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism."[10] As this paper forms the centrepiece of Rowe's early period, future references to Rowe's argument from evil developed during this period will sometimes be abbreviated as 'the 1979 argument'. Also of importance at this time are two papers where Rowe is primarily concerned with some objections raised against his argument: "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra,"[11] and "The Empirical Argument from Evil."[12] In what follows, however, I will restrict myself to an exposition of Rowe's argument from evil, drawing in the main from his 1979 paper.

1.1   The 1979 Argument

In presenting an evidential argument from evil, Rowe thinks it best to focus on a particular kind of evil that is found in our world in abundance. He therefore selects "intense human and animal suffering" as this occurs on a daily basis, is in great plenitude in our world, and is a clear case of evil. More precisely, it is a case of *intrinsic* evil: it is bad in and of itself, even though it sometimes is part of, or leads to, some good state of affairs.[13] Rowe then proceeds to state his argument for atheism as follows:

(1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

(2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of
    any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby
    losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or
    worse.

(3) (Therefore) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly
    good being.[14]

This argument, as Rowe points out, is clearly valid, and so if there are
rational grounds for accepting its premises, to that extent there are rational
grounds for accepting the conclusion, that is to say, atheism.

1.2   The Theological Premise

The second premise may be called 'the theological premise' as it
expresses a belief about what God as a perfectly good being would do under
certain circumstances. In particular, this premise states that if such a being
knew of some intense suffering that was about to take place and was in a
position to prevent its occurrence, then it would prevent it *unless* it could not
do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil
equally bad or worse. As premise (2) is commonly thought to be the least con-
troversial aspect of Rowe's argument, we may begin with Rowe's strategy for
defending this premise.

Let *E* be an instance of intense human or animal suffering which could be
prevented by an omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good being. Rowe puts
forward the following necessary condition for God failing to prevent *E*, that
is to say, a condition that must obtain in order for God not to prevent *E*:

(C) *Either* (i) there is some greater good *G*, such that *G* is obtainable by
    God only if God permits *E*,
        or (ii) there is some greater good *G*, such that *G* is obtainable by
    God only if God permits either *E* or some evil equally bad or worse,
        or (iii) *E* is such that it is preventable by God only if God permits
    some evil equally bad or worse.[15]

Condition (i) is to be distinguished from (iii), as the former states that the
cost of preventing *E* is the loss of some greater good, whereas the latter
states that the cost of preventing *E* is the existence of an evil equally bad or
worse than *E*. The assumption here is that the absence of a good state of
affairs need not itself be an evil state of affairs. Condition (i) must also be
distinguished from (ii). For according to (ii), if God did prevent *E*, *G* would
be lost *unless* God permitted some evil equal to (or worse than) *E*. In a

scenario such as this, God could not be blamed for not preventing *E*. As this kind of situation is not envisaged by condition (i), a separate condition in the form of (ii) is required.

Rowe goes on to qualify condition (i) in three ways. First, in line with deontological ethical theories, *G* may include the fulfillment of certain moral principles or duties. Second, *G* need not *follow in time* the occurrence of *E*. And thirdly, Rowe grants that God can allow *E* for the sake of some good *G* even if *G* is not greater than *E* but is such that allowing *E* and *G*, rather than preventing *E* and thereby losing *G*, does not affect the overall balance of good and evil in the world. However, if this third qualification is granted, condition (i) would need to be weakened accordingly.[16]

The point behind premise (2) may now be clearer. If God could prevent some intense suffering but nevertheless permits it to occur, then one of the three conditions in (C) must obtain. But if this is the case, then premise (2) is true. For according to (2), if God could prevent any intense suffering then he would do so, unless doing so would result in losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. Premise (2), then, encapsulates in a succinct form the meaning of (C).

Rowe adds that this premise, or something similar, "is held in common by many atheists and nontheists"[17] and, moreover, it "accords with our basic moral principles."[18] However, one may object, as does Ivan in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, that no good can be great enough to justify the horrendous suffering of an innocent child.[19] Furthermore, one might argue that even if some good outweighs an instance of suffering and would be lost if the suffering were prevented, this is not a morally sufficient reason for permitting the suffering. Rowe argues that these criticisms are entirely consistent with premise (2), for this premise only intends to provide a *necessary* condition, not a *sufficient* condition, for God permitting intense suffering. Seen in this light, (2) appears to be quite uncontroversial and so, as Rowe puts it, "if we are to fault the argument for atheism … it seems we must find some fault with its first premise."[20]

1.3 The Factual Premise

Criticisms of Rowe's argument have usually focused on its first premise, which may be dubbed 'the factual premise' as it purports to state a fact about the world. Briefly put, the fact in question is that there exist instances of intense suffering which are gratuitous or pointless. An instance of suffering is gratuitous, according to Rowe, if an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented it without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. A gratuitous evil, in this sense, is a

state of affairs that is not (logically) necessary to the attainment of a greater good or to the prevention of an evil at least as bad. Rowe's argument in support of gratuitous evils, particularly as developed in "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," may be outlined as follows:[21]

Step 1: The case of the fawn. Rowe asks us to imagine the following hypothetical scenario:

> Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.[22]

Although this is presented as a hypothetical, Rowe takes it to be "a familiar sort of tragedy, played not infrequently on the stage of nature."[23]

Step 2: The preventability of the fawn's suffering. Rowe next points out that, clearly, the fawn's suffering was *preventable*. By this he means that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have easily prevented the fawn from being burned or, given the burning, could have spared the fawn the intense suffering by quickly ending its life.

Step 3: So far as we can see, the fawn's suffering is pointless. Rowe argues that, upon reflecting on the fawn's suffering, we fail to see any greater good connected to it in such a way that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require the loss of that good. Moreover, we fail to notice any equally bad or worse evil so related to the fawn's suffering that it would have had to occur had the fawn's suffering been prevented. Rowe, therefore, states that "so far as we can see, the fawn's suffering is pointless."[24]

Conclusion: On the basis of the foregoing, it is reasonable to conclude that there exists at least one instance of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Rowe, however, thinks that the case of the fawn in step 1 can be substituted by innumerable other instances of evil that occur in our world. His argument in support of (1), therefore, does not rest entirely on one instance of animal suffering. To illustrate this, Rowe supposes, contrary to the above conclusion, that the fawn's suffering is not in fact pointless:

Step 4: Suppose that the fawn's suffering only appears to be pointless, but is not in fact pointless. In making this assumption, what one is in effect saying is that it is reasonable to believe that there is some greater good so connected to the fawn's suffering that even God could not have obtained that good without permitting that suffering or, alternatively, that it is reasonable to believe that there is some evil at least as bad as the fawn's suffering such that God could not have prevented that evil without permitting the fawn's suffering.

Step 5: It is not reasonable to believe that **all** *instances of seemingly pointless intense human and animal suffering are not in fact pointless.* Rowe contends that, even if it were reasonable to believe all the aforementioned things (in step 4) regarding the fawn's suffering, it would not be reasonable to believe the same regarding *all* instances of apparently pointless human and animal suffering that occur in our world. In fact, Rowe calls the belief that no instantiation of intense human and animal suffering could have been prevented by an omnipotent being without thereby losing a greater good or allowing an evil at least as bad, an "extraordinary, absurd idea, quite beyond our belief."[25] He bases this contention on the following considerations:

(a) Our experience and knowledge of the enormous variety and scale of intense human and animal suffering in the world.
(b) Our understanding of the goods that do exist and that we can imagine coming into existence.
(c) The fact that much human and animal suffering seems quite unrelated to any greater goods (or the absence of equal or greater evils) that might justify it.
(d) The fact that such suffering as is related to greater goods (or the absence of equal or greater evils) does not, in many cases, seem so intimately related as to require its permission by an omnipotent being intent on securing those goods (or the absence of those evils).
(e) Our reasonable judgments as to what an omniscient and perfectly good being would endeavour to accomplish with respect to human (and animal) good and evil in the world.[26]

Conclusion: Rowe concludes that it is reasonable to believe that there exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

There is, however, an important ambiguity in the above argument, for it is not clear whether Rowe is appealing only to particular instances of evil or to the quantity of evil. In steps 1–3, he employs the example of the fawn as a dramatic illustration of pointless evil. He insists, however, that this is merely an example or a 'case in point'. Many other cases from the vast array of evils permeating our world could have been used. Rowe concedes that if the example of the fawn were the only instance of apparently pointless suffering available, then it would not be unreasonable to believe that somehow even an infinitely intelligent, all-powerful being could not achieve its good ends without permitting the fawn's suffering. But, as Rowe points out in a recent paper, "our world is not like that. It is the *enormous amount* of apparently pointless, horrendous suffering occurring daily in our world that grounds

the claim in the first premise that there are pointless evils in our world."[27] This suggests two different ways of understanding Rowe's argument in support of the factual premise.

To begin with, we may follow Daniel Howard-Snyder in thinking of Rowe as constructing two separate lists: a List of Inscrutable Evils and a List of Pointless Evils.[28] The former consists of propositions such as the following:

   (i) So far as we can see, the fawn's suffering is pointless.
  (ii) So far as we can see, the systematic extermination of Jews during
        WWII was pointless.

  .
  .
  .

   The List of Pointless Evils runs parallel to the above list:

  (i′) The fawn's suffering is pointless.
 (ii′) The systematic extermination of Jews during WWII was pointless.

  .
  .
  .

Rowe's emphasis on the quantity of apparently pointless evil can be viewed in one of two ways. First, his point may be that the inference from (i) to (i′) can also be drawn in relation to countless other instances of evil occurring in the world, thus leading us to believe that there are many pointless evils. Alternatively, in line with step 5 above, Rowe's position may be that if there are numerous entries in the List of Inscrutable Evils then it is not reasonable to believe that all entries in the List of Pointless Evils are false. In other words, the existence of so much evil for which no greater good can be discerned makes it highly likely that at least some instances of inscrutable evil do not in fact serve any greater good. The sheer quantity of horrific suffering makes it likely that at least some entries in the List of Pointless Evils are true, even if we cannot identify the entries in question.[29]

Rowe sometimes gives the impression that the earlier reading best represents his case in support of the factual premise, particularly when citing specific entries such as (i′) and (ii′) in the List of Pointless Evils as being true. His argument for the factual premise would then proceed as follows:

  (4) So far as we can tell, there are a great number of instances of intense
       suffering that are pointless – for example, the case of the fawn.

(5) (Therefore) It is probably the case that there are a great number of instances of intense suffering that are pointless.

However, Rowe also leans towards the second reading when stating that what grounds the factual premise that there are pointless evils is the existence of a vast amount of apparently pointless evil. In that case, the crucial inference in support of the factual premise would run something like this:

(4) So far as we can tell, there are a great number of instances of intense suffering that are pointless – for example, the case of the fawn.
(5′) (Therefore) It is probably the case that at least some instances of apparently pointless intense suffering are in fact pointless.

My procedure in what follows will be to adopt that interpretation encapsulated by the inference from (4) to (5) while, firstly, acknowledging that the alternative interpretation is equally feasible, and secondly, taking both readings into account if anything of significance hangs on this matter.[30]

Two further points may be made in relation to Rowe's case in support of the factual premise. First, the phrase 'so far as we can tell' in (4) is intended to capture the considerations adumbrated in steps 3 and 5 in support of the existence of pointless suffering. Premise (4), then, is to be read as the claim that, having carefully reflected on the relationship between God, various evils, and possible and actual goods, we fail to see any point served by the existence of such evils. But if, after careful reflection, we see no point served by instances of intense human and animal suffering, then we have good reason to believe there is no point served by such suffering. Premise (5), therefore, follows from (4).

Second, Rowe takes the inference from (4) to (5) to be an inductive one. He does not claim to *know* or be able to *prove* that cases of intense suffering such as the fawn's are indeed pointless. For as he points out, it is quite possible that there is some familiar good outweighing the fawn's suffering and which is connected to that suffering in a way unbeknown to us. Or there may be goods we are not aware of, to which the fawn's suffering is intimately connected. But although we do not know or cannot establish the truth of (1), we do possess *rational grounds* for accepting (1), and these grounds consist of the considerations outlined in steps 3 and 5.

1.4   Wykstra on Rowe's Case in Support of the Factual Premise

A different representation of Rowe's argument in support of the factual premise is offered by Stephen Wykstra.[31] According to Wykstra, Rowe's

case for (1) can be outlined as follows:

> (6) We see no good for which God would allow *e*, where *e* is the fawn's
>   suffering.
> (7) (Therefore) There appears to be no good for which God allows *e*.
> (8) (Therefore) There is no good for which God allows *e*.

Wykstra presents Rowe as arguing that we cannot see (or think of) any out-weighing good served by the fawn's suffering, and that therefore the suffering does not appear to serve any such good. But, by application of the Principle of Credulity (according to which, if something appears to be a certain way, then – provided there is no counterevidence – it is reasonable to believe it is in fact that way), if the fawn's suffering does not appear to serve any outweighing good, we may justifiably conclude that there is no such good.

As will be seen in the following chapters, Wykstra expends much effort analyzing 'appears' locutions and developing a principle governing their use, before concluding that Rowe is not justified in making the 'appears' claim in (7). In his initial response to Wykstra, Rowe does not object to this presentation of his argument.[32] Should we conclude, then, that Wykstra has not misrepresented Rowe?

Rowe's argument does seem to be open to Wykstra's reading, especially since Rowe, in his 1986 paper "The Empirical Argument from Evil," appeals to the Principle of Credulity as helping to bridge the logical gap between apparently pointless and genuinely pointless suffering.[33] But in spite of Rowe's use of the Principle of Credulity, it will be shown in Section 3 of Chapter 4 that this principle has in fact little bearing or relevance to Rowe's evidential argument. Furthermore, there is no justification for the imputation to Rowe of the distinction between (6) and (7). Rowe nowhere distinguishes these two propositions, at least in any unambiguous manner. He writes, for example, that

> *So far as we can see*, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For *there does not appear to be* any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse.[34]

For Rowe, then, (6) and (7) are merely stylistic variants of the same proposition. Therefore, it seems more accurate to present Rowe's argument in support of the factual premise in terms of an inference from (4) to (5), rather than in terms of the move from (6) to (7) and thence to (8). Not much of importance, however, will depend on which reading is adopted.[35]

2   THE MIDDLE ROWE (1988–95)

Beginning in 1988 with the paper "Evil and Theodicy," Rowe formulated a second version of the evidential argument. Although there are some important differences between this version and the original statement of the argument, I will argue that the two are essentially the same, with the later argument merely being stated in a more precise and systematic manner than the earlier one. There is therefore a strong continuity between the early and middle Rowe, and so it is a mistake to think of the two time-slices as offering distinct evidential arguments.

2.1   The Factual Premise Revisited

One way in which Rowe develops the 1979 argument during his middle period relates to his defence of the factual premise. In the earlier argument Rowe adopted as his starting-point the case of the fawn as an instance of intense animal suffering. This natural evil is supplemented by Rowe, during his middle period, with a case of moral evil involving human suffering due to the intentional action of a human agent. This second case is an actual event in which a five-year-old girl in Flint, Michigan was severely beaten, raped and then strangled to death early on New Year's Day in 1986. The case was introduced by Bruce Russell, whose account of it, drawn from a report in the *Detroit Free Press* of January 3, 1986, runs as follows:

> The girl's mother was living with her boyfriend, another man who was unemployed, her two children, and her 9-month old infant fathered by the boyfriend. On New Year's Eve all three adults were drinking at a bar near the woman's home. The boyfriend had been taking drugs and drinking heavily. He was asked to leave the bar at 8:00 PM After several reappearances he finally stayed away for good at about 9:30 PM The woman and the unemployed man remained at the bar until 2:00 AM at which time the woman went home and the man to a party at a neighbor's home. Perhaps out of jealousy, the boyfriend attacked the woman when she walked into the house. Her brother was there and broke up the fight by hitting the boyfriend who was passed out and slumped over a table when the brother left. Later the boyfriend attacked the woman again, and this time she knocked him unconscious. After checking the children, she went to bed. Later the woman's 5-year old girl went downstairs to go to the bathroom. The unemployed man returned from the party at 3:45 AM and found the 5-year old dead. She had been raped, severely beaten over most of her body and strangled to death by the boyfriend.[36]

Following Rowe, the case of the fawn will be referred to as $E1$, and the case of the little girl as $E2$.[37] Further, following Alston's practice, the fawn will be named 'Bambi' and the little girl 'Sue'.[38]

Rowe states that, in choosing to focus on $E1$ and $E2$, he is "trying to pose a serious difficulty for the theist by picking a difficult case of natural evil, $E1$ (Bambi), and a difficult case of moral evil, $E2$ (Sue)."[39] Rowe, then, is attempting to state the evidential argument in the strongest possible terms. As one commentator has put it, "if these cases of evil [$E1$ and $E2$] are not evidence against theism, then none are."[40] However, Rowe's almost exclusive preoccupation with these two instances of suffering during his middle period must be placed within the context of his belief, dating back to his 1979 argument, that even if we discovered that God could not have eliminated $E1$ and $E2$ without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse, it would still be unreasonable to believe this of all cases of horrendous evil occurring daily in our world.[41] $E1$ and $E2$ are thus best viewed as representative of a particular class of evil which poses a specific problem for theistic belief. This problem is expressed by Rowe in the following way:

> (P) No good state of affairs we know of is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being's permitting $E1$ or $E2$.

Therefore,

> (Q) No good state of affairs is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being in permitting $E1$ or $E2$.[42]

P states that no good we know of justifies (or would justify) God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$. From this it is inferred that Q is likely to be true, or that probably there are no goods which justify (or would justify) God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$. Rowe therefore bases his case for the factual premise on the inference from P to Q and this, as will be detailed below, resembles closely his strategy for defending the factual premise in his original argument from evil.

2.2   The Inference from P to Q

The first question to be addressed when considering this inference is: What exactly do P and Q assert? Beginning with P, the central notion here is 'a good state of affairs we know of'. But what is it to know of a good state

of affairs? According to Rowe, to know of a good state of affairs is to (a) conceive of that state of affairs, and (b) recognize that it is intrinsically good (examples of states that are intrinsically good include pleasure, happiness, love, and the exercise of virtue).[43] Rowe therefore instructs us to not limit the set of goods we know of to goods that we know have occurred in the past or to goods that we know will occur in the future. The set of goods we know of must also include goods that we have some grasp of, even if we do not know whether they have occurred or ever will occur. For example, such a good, in the case of Sue, may consist of the experience of eternal bliss in the hereafter. Even though we lack a clear grasp of what this good involves, and even though we cannot be sure that such a good will ever obtain, we do well to include this good amongst the goods we know of. A good that we know of, however, cannot justify God in permitting $E1$ or $E2$ unless that good is actualized at some time.[44]

What, then, are the truth-conditions for P?[45] At least one condition that would render P true is the nonoccurrence of some known good whose occurrence is necessary and sufficient for God being justified in permitting $E1$ and $E2$. For example, if experiencing eternal felicity in the presence of God is the only known good that would justify God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$, but neither Sue nor Bambi is granted any form of post-mortem existence, then P is true. Another condition that would render P true is the nonexistence of God. This becomes clear once we distinguish P from P':

> (P') No good we know of *would* justify God *(if God exists)* in permitting $E1$ and $E2$.

According to Rowe, it is sufficient for P to be true if God does not exist. However, P' can be false even if God does not exist, for even if there were no God it could still be true that if God did exist some good we know of would justify him in permitting $E1$ and $E2$.

Therefore, to avoid confusing P with P', P should be thought of as the negation of the following proposition:

> (not-P) God exists & there exists a good we know of & that good justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$.

P is thus equivalent to the following disjunction:

> (P'') Either God does not exist, or (God exists and no known good justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$).[46]

On what grounds does Rowe think that P is true? Rowe states that "we have *good reason* to believe that no good state of affairs we know of would justify an omnipotent, omniscient being in permitting either $E1$ or $E2$."[47] The good reason in question consists of the fact that the good states of affairs we know of, when reflecting on them, meet one or both of the following conditions: either an omnipotent being could obtain them without having to permit $E1$ or $E2$, or obtaining them would not morally justify that being in permitting $E1$ or $E2$.[48] This bears a striking resemblance to the considerations given by the early Rowe in support of (4). Indeed, (4) plays the same role in the original argument as does P in this argument: they form the basis upon which the factual premise is upheld.

The factual premise in the present argument corresponds to Q. But what does Q assert? In short, it states that no good justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$. As with P, the nonexistence of God is a sufficient condition for the truth of Q. For if God does not exist, then it is not the case that there is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who is justified in permitting $E1$ and $E2$ by way of realizing some good. Again, this can be seen by taking the negation of Q to be:

(not-Q) God exists & there is a good that justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$.[49]

This brings us, finally, to Rowe's inference from P to Q. This is, of course, an inductive inference and parallels the inference from (4) to (5) in Rowe's original argument. The truth of P is taken to provide strong evidence for the truth of Q. According to Jeff Jordan, however, Rowe does not specify in what way the truth of one proposition can be viewed as evidence for the truth of another.[50] Jordan therefore suggests that we follow Gilbert Harman in taking the truth of a proposition X to be evidence for another proposition Y just in case the truth of Y *explains* the truth of X.[51] This seems to be a plausible suggestion, at least when applied to the inference from P to Q. For it is reasonable to think that if Q were true, that would explain P's being true, since Q entails P. The problem with Jordan's proposal, however, is that it overlooks the fact that Rowe takes the inference from P to Q to be an enumerative induction rather than an inference to the best explanation.[52]

Rowe states that "we are justified in making this inference [from P to Q] in the same way we are justified in making the many inferences we constantly make from the known to the unknown."[53] We frequently make inferences of the form: 'We have observed many A's and we have found that all of them are B's; therefore, the A's we have yet to observe are also B's'. Such inferences, argues Rowe, are entirely permissible and rational. If, for

example, I encounter a fair number of pit bulls and all of them are vicious, I have reason to believe that all pit bulls are vicious. Of course, any number of considerations may defeat this inference. I may discover, for example, that all the pit bulls I have encountered have been trained for dog-fighting, whereas other pit bulls are not so trained. This additional information would then defeat my inference. However, the inference, given my initial information, was a reasonable one to draw. To argue that we cannot be justified in drawing such inferences unless we already know, or have good reason to believe, that were a pit bull not vicious (or were an A not a B) it would likely be among the pit bulls (the A's) we have already observed is "simply to encourage radical skepticism concerning inductive reasoning in general."[54]

2.3   The Structure of the Argument

On the basis of *P*, Rowe infers that *Q* is probably the case. But how does the remainder of his argument proceed? In "Evil and Theodicy," Rowe spells out the rest of the argument as follows:

> From *P* we inferred *Q* (no good at all would justify an omnipotent, omniscient being in permitting *E*1 or *E*2). Suppose we are justified in believing *Q* on the basis of our belief that *P*. If so, then, since we see that *Q* would be false if *O* [i.e., an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being] existed, we are justified in believing that *O* does not exist.[55]

This gives the impression, as Jeff Jordan has noticed, that Rowe's argument as presented during his middle period has a two-step structure.[56] The first step is the inductive inference from *P* to *Q*. The second step is a deductive inference from *Q* to ~*G* (i.e., there is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being). Indeed, this is how Rowe himself was to present the argument of his middle period when reflecting on it in a later paper.[57]

However, the inference from *Q* to ~*G* is not as straightforward as the foregoing implies. *Q* asserts that there is no good which justifies God in permitting certain evils. But from this it does not necessarily follow that God does not exist. This only follows if one accepts that, necessarily, there are no pointless evils if God exists. This unstated premise is essentially the same as the theological premise (i.e., premise (2)) of the 1979 argument. It may be more accurate, therefore, to present the middle Rowe's argument in terms of both a factual premise and a theological premise, with the factual premise being supported by an appeal to P, just as it was supported by means of (4) in the 1979 argument.[58]

The structure of the middle Rowe's argument is, then, very similar to the 1979 argument. The similarities are so close, however, that it is best to think

of these formulations as being in effect expressions of the *one* argument. Both formulations employ the same premises and both strive to support the factual premise by way of an inductive inference. Nevertheless, there are differences. The inference from *P* to *Q* is, in the middle Rowe, an explicit and quite precise argument in support of the factual premise, whereas such an inference is only hinted at or implied by the early Rowe. A further point of difference is the middle Rowe's decisive turn away from the 'appears' and 'seems' locutions that the early Rowe had made ample use of. Rowe points out in "Ruminations about Evil" that his "use of these expressions has led to some misunderstanding of the argument,"[59] and so he steers clear of them, with the result the Principle of Credulity has no further role to play in his argument. These differences, however, do not run deep, but are merely attempts to clarify and strengthen the argument without departing to any significant extent from its original formulation.

3   THE LATE ROWE (1996–PRESENT)

As we have seen, Rowe's case for the factual premise was originally based on the inference from (4) to (5), with this later being replaced by the inference from *P* to *Q*. However, mainly in the light of objections raised by William Alston, Rowe developed a sceptical attitude towards the argument he originally gave in support of this inference. His disenchantment with the induction from *P* to *Q* led him in 1996 to publish a further version of the evidential argument. This formulation, as I hope to show, marks a significant departure from previous versions and must therefore be considered a separate argument in its own right, as opposed to merely being a refinement or development of a preceding argument.

3.1   Rowe's New Evidential Argument

Rowe's first and most thorough presentation of his new argument occurs in his 1996 paper, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," and I will concentrate on this paper when outlining the argument.[60] Rowe begins by recapitulating the argument of his middle period as follows:

(*P*) No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting *E*1 and *E*2.

(*Q*) (Therefore) No good at all justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting *E*1 and *E*2.

(not-*G*) (Therefore) There is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good
         being.[61]

We saw earlier that this is not an entirely accurate representation of the mid-
dle Rowe's argument, but that need not detain us here. Rowe's new argu-
ment is in some respects simpler than its predecessor as it bypasses *Q* and
proceeds directly from *P* to ~*G*:

(*P*) No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly
     good being in permitting *E*1 and *E*2.

Therefore, it is probable that

(~*G*) There is no omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being.[62]

But what truly sets this argument apart from previous formulations is its
appeal to Bayesian probability theory. It is only natural, therefore, that the
notion of 'background information' should loom large in Rowe's case.
    Rowe argues that the background information *k* on which we are to rely
in forming judgments about the likelihood of *P* and *G* (God exists) must be
restricted almost entirely to information that is shared by most theists and
nontheists who have given some thought to the issues raised by the problem
of evil.[63] Rowe therefore admits the following into *k*:

- our common knowledge of the occurrence of various evils in our
  world, including *E*1 and *E*2;
- our knowledge that the world contains a great amount of evil;
- our knowledge of many of the goods that occur and many of the goods
  that do not occur, and
- our common knowledge of the way the world works and the kinds of
  things that exist in the world.

However, *k* will *not* include any of the following information:

- God exists, or God does not exist;
- *P* or ~*P*, and
- any explicit claim as to whether the goods we know of are representa-
  tive of all the goods there are.

Our background information, according to Rowe, must also include certain
prior probability assignments, such as the following:

(*k*1) $\Pr(G/k) = 0.5$

(k2) Pr ($\sim$G/k) = 0.5
(k3) Pr (P/G & k) = 0.5
(k4) Pr ($\sim$P/G & k) = 0.5

The second pair of probability assignments will be discussed later. In relation to the first pair, Rowe points out that theists and nontheists are bound to disagree on the assignment that should be given to the probability that God exists, given k. Many nontheists, for example, hold that the enormous amount of evil in our world renders the existence of God unlikely. Many theists, on the other hand, will disagree. In order not to beg any questions against any of these groups, Rowe chooses to assign a probability of 0.5 to Pr (G/k), as well as 0.5 to Pr ($\sim$G/k). That is to say, k in and of itself makes neither theism nor atheism more likely than not.

It is evident that what guides Rowe in these assignments of prior probability values is his *level playing field assumption*, which may be stated as follows:

(LPA) An assignment of probability values in k is acceptable just in case the probabilities of neither theism nor atheism are raised above 0.5 in k by those probability assignments.[64]

Our background evidence would then be, in the words of Jeff Jordan, "a neutral space, supporting neither theism nor atheism, inhabited by methodological agnostics."[65] The level playing field assumption, however, is not intended to deny the nontheist's view concerning the possible negative evidential impact of the existence and multitude of horrendous evils on theism, nor is it to deny the theist's view of the possible positive evidential impact of, for example, the existence of a world exhibiting order. Rather, it is to take each of these views as counterbalancing one another, so that the totality of k leaves the likelihood of God's existence at 0.5.[66]

Rowe concedes, however, that once LPA is granted his evidential argument becomes, at best, only *prima facie* evidence against theism. For even if one is persuaded by his evidential argument, one may add to k further information regarding, for example, the occurrence of ordinary or mystical religious experiences, and this may restore the balance between theism and atheism or even tip the scales in favour of theism. Rowe emphasizes, as he did in his earlier writings by way of the notion of the 'G.E. Moore shift', that he is *not* arguing that no matter what other evidence a person S has, as long as S understands the argument from evil and accepts the grounds for its premises, it is not rational for S to believe in God. For S may be in possession of even stronger evidence for theism than is provided by the problem of evil for atheism.[67]

Having specified what can and cannot be included in *k*, Rowe turns to the issue of whether someone whose knowledge consisted solely of *k* would, upon learning *P*, have a reason for ~*G*. He therefore poses the following two questions:

(*Q*.1) Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < Pr (*G*/*k*)? That is, does *P* make *G* less likely than it would otherwise be?

(*Q*.2) Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < 0.5? That is, does *P* make *G* less likely than not?[68]

Rowe proposes to answer both of these questions in one fell swoop by appealing to Bayes' Theorem:

$$\text{Pr}(G/P \text{ \& } k) = \text{Pr}(G/k) \times \frac{\text{Pr}(P/G \text{ \& } k)}{\text{Pr}(P/k)}$$

He then advances the following argument:

(9) Pr (*G*/*k*) = 0.5. [from *k*1]

(10) *If* Pr (*P*/*k*) > Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*) *then* Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < Pr (*G*/*k*).

This last premise follows from the general claim that *G* makes *P* less likely than it would otherwise be if and only if *P* makes *G* less likely than it would otherwise be.

(11) Pr (*P*/*k*) > Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*).

(12) Therefore, Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < Pr (*G*/*k*), that is, given *k*, *P* makes *G* less likely than it would otherwise be. [from (10) & (11)]

(13) Therefore, Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < 0.5, that is, given *k*, *P* makes *G* less likely than not. [from (9) & (12)]

The crucial premise is, of course, (11). In determining the truth-value of this premise, Rowe begins by considering Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*). As noted earlier, this was given in (*k*3) a value of 0.5. However, Rowe thinks it does not matter much, at least for the purpose of showing that Pr (*G*/*P* & *k*) < 0.5, what value is assigned to Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*), as long as it is less than 1. Theodicists may claim that Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*) < 0.5, whereas theists who find it difficult to discern any good whose realization might be God's reason for permitting *E*1 and *E*2 would be more attracted to an assignment of 0.5 or higher. For the sake of argument, Rowe settles on a 0.5 reading.

Rowe then considers the next half of (11): Pr (*P*/*k*). He goes about determining the probability of Pr (*P*/*k*) in the following manner:

(14) Pr (*P*/*k*) = [Pr (*G*/*k*) × Pr (*P*/*G* & *k*)] + [Pr (~*G*/*k*) x Pr (*P*/~*G* & *k*)].

Rowe here employs the Rule of Elimination. This is a weighted averages principle, so that the probability of P is taken to be the average of its probabilities on $(G \& k)$ and $(\sim G \& k)$, with those averages weighted by the probabilities of G and $\sim G$ on k.

(15) Pr $(G/k) = 0.5$ [from $k1$]
        Pr $(P/G \& k) = 0.5$ [from $k3$]
        Therefore, the product of the left-hand side of the plus sign (in the above instantiation of the Rule of Elimination) is 0.25.
(16) Pr $(\sim G/k) = 0.5$ [from $k2$]
        Pr $(P/\sim G \& k)$ is 1
        Therefore, the product of the right-hand side of the plus sign is 0.5.

As pointed out in Section 2.2 above, P is understood by Rowe to mean that

(P″) Either God does not exist, or (God exists and no known good justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$).

P is therefore entailed by $\sim G$, and this is why Rowe takes Pr $(P/\sim G \& k)$ to be 1.[69] From (14), (15) and (16), Rowe concludes that

(17) (Therefore) Pr (P/k) is 0.75.

Thus, it has been shown that Pr $(P/k) >$ Pr $(P/G \& k)$, and so premise (11) has been vindicated. In addition, given that Pr $(P/k) = 0.75$, in conjunction with $(k1)$ and $(k3)$, it follows from Bayes' Theorem that Pr $(G/P \& k) = 0.333$. In short, P not only lowers the probability of G, but also reduces it below 0.5.[70]
    Rowe's new evidential argument may now be set out as follows:

(18) Assume only the information given in k, including the prior probability assignments specified in $(k1)$–$(k4)$.
(19) Pr $(G/P \& k) = 0.333$. [from (9) to (18)]
(20) We have good reason to believe P.

Interestingly, Rowe's case in support of (20) has altered slightly in that it is no longer based solely on the claim, also made during his early and middle periods, that the goods we know of are either insufficient to justify God in permitting $E1$ or $E2$, or could be realized by God without having to permit $E1$ or $E2$. Rowe now adds a further reason to believe that P is true, viz., "the failure of theodicists to show how any of the goods we know of can plausibly be held, separately or collectively, to constitute

a sufficient reason for God to permit $E1$ or $E2$."[71] Given (18)–(20), it may be concluded that

(21) (Therefore) It is likely that God does not exist.

Rowe thus claims to have shown that if our background information is restricted to k and we abide by the prior probabilities stipulated in k, then once we are introduced to P as new evidence, the posterior probability value of theism would be reduced to?. Rowe therefore concludes that, "given our common knowledge of the evils and goods in the world and our reasons for believing that P is true, it is *irrational* to believe in theism unless we possess or discover strong evidence in its behalf."[72]

3.2   Atheism or Agnosticism?

Rowe, however, believes that an important question remains regarding the degree of support his new argument provides to atheism. In particular, does the conjunction $(P \& k)$ lower the probability of G to such an extent as to make atheism epistemically preferable to agnosticism. In Section V of his paper, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," Rowe considers whether his argument merely shows that $(P \& k)$ is a good reason to believe that G is less likely than not, or whether it also shows that the $(P \& k)$ is a good reason to believe that G is false.[73] If his argument succeeds in the former, but not in the latter, respect then the argument will not be of sufficient strength to convert an agnostic to atheism, even though it may make it more rational to uphold atheism than to uphold theism. If, for instance, Pr $(G/P \& k) = 0.45$, we would agree that P is good reason to believe that G is less likely than not. However, given that 0.45 is close to 0.5, the only rational course of action would be to be agnostic about the truth or falsity of G.

But how low must the probability of G, given $(P \& k)$, be in order for P to be a good reason to believe $\sim G$? Perhaps $\sim G$ must be twice as likely as G. This requirement, Rowe points out, can be satisfied by means of his new evidential argument, according to which the Pr $(G/P \& k)$ is not greater than 0.333. Wykstra, however, has argued that a probability of $^1/_3$ may be sufficiently low to make atheism more reasonable than theism, but not low enough to make it more reasonable to adopt atheism than to uphold agnosticism. Rather, the probability of theism must be lowered to something under 0.05 in order to justify the shift from our initial position of square agnosticism to square atheism.[74]

Rowe concurs with Wykstra on this matter. However, Rowe argues that the move to square atheism can be justified once a further argument from

evil is introduced. Instead of arguing from instances of evil, such as $E1$ and $E2$, which seem to us to be gratuitous, one may argue from the mere fact that the world contains vast amounts of human and animal suffering.[75] The former argument rests on a statement, P, that is not a part of k, whereas the latter argument is based on our shared knowledge of the kinds, amounts and distribution of evils, all of which is already contained in k. An argument of the latter kind would confirm that Pr $(G/k) < 0.5$. In that case, however, the probability of G, given $(P \& k)$, would fall below 0.333. How low it would fall depends on the values assigned to other statements. For example, if one accepts that Pr $(G/k) = 0.2$ and Pr $(P/G \& k) = 0.25$, then Pr $(G/P \& k)$ would fall below 0.06. In such a scenario, of course, our initial position would not be one of square agnosticism, since we would no longer be taking Pr (G/k) to be 0.5. But if we take k' to be k less our shared information about the kinds, amounts and distribution of evils, then it can be argued that, given a 0.5 reading of Pr (G/k'), the combination of the two kinds of arguments from evil considered here would suffice to justify the move from agnosticism to atheism.

This is a significant concession on Rowe's behalf. For unlike his attitude towards his previous arguments, he does not think of his current evidential argument as making atheism entirely reasonable to believe. A further argument from evil, according to Rowe, is required before the move from agnosticism to atheism can be made. Without such an argument, the facts of suffering would only produce, at best, a state of nonbelief with a serious tilt towards disbelief.

3.3   Rowe's Resurrection of the 'Middle' Argument from Evil

Rowe is sometimes portrayed as having abandoned the argument developed during his middle period. Plantinga, for example, writes:

> Partly under the pressure of objections by Stephen Wykstra, William Alston and others, however, Rowe has come to take rather a dim view of this argument [from P and Q to $\sim G$].[76]

Jeff Jordan, in a similar vein, states:

> The 1988 two-step version [i.e., the argument from P and Q], Professor Rowe now reports, "is, at best, a weak argument."[77]

This, however, is a misreading of Rowe. Close attention to the relevant section in "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look" clearly shows

that Rowe has no intention of abandoning the induction from P to Q or rejecting the argument from evil he put forward based on this induction.[78] What he proposes, instead, is to revamp the argument of his middle period by drawing on some of the assumptions and premises of his new evidential argument. I turn now to a brief description of this resurrection that Rowe has performed on his 'middle' argument.

As we saw in Section 2.2 above, Rowe defended the inference from P to Q by taking it to be one more instance of our common practice of making inferences from the known to the unknown. According to this line of thought, the inference from P to Q is analogous to the inference from 'All the A's we've observed are B's' to 'All A's are B's'. If we have observed many A's and found all of them to be B's, then we would have a *prima facie* good reason to believe that the A's we have yet to observe are also B's – that is to say, that all A's are B's. William Alston has objected to this argument, stating that the epistemic worth of the inference from P to Q is dependent on whether we have some reason to think it likely that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are. Lacking any such reason, the argument proposed by Rowe is sufficient to establish only that P is a good reason for Q in the sense of making Q more likely than it would otherwise be. But one proposition may make another more likely than it would otherwise be without making it more likely than not.[79] Rowe finds this objection convincing and so he now thinks that the argument he gave in support of the inference from P to Q is, at best, a weak one. He has, nevertheless, offered a different and, in his view, better argument for thinking that P makes Q more likely than not.[80]

His case in support of the inference from P to Q, like his new evidential argument, is couched in probability theory. To show that P makes Q more likely than not, or that $\Pr(Q/P \& k) > \Pr(\sim Q/P \& k)$, he begins with the following application of Bayes' Theorem:

$$\Pr(Q / P \& k) = \Pr(Q / k) \times \frac{\Pr(P / Q \& k)}{\Pr(P / k)}$$

Given that $\Pr(P/Q \& k) = 1$ (since Q entails P), the above formula can be restated thus:

$$\Pr(Q / P \& k) = \frac{\Pr(Q / k)}{\Pr(P / k)}$$

What, then, is the value of $\Pr(Q/k)$? This can be determined as follows:

(22) $\Pr(Q/k) = [\Pr(G/k) \times \Pr(Q/G \& k)] + [\Pr(\sim G/k) \times \Pr(Q/\sim G \& k)]$.

This is, as in (14), an instantiation of the Rule of Elimination.

(23) Pr (G/k) = 0.5 [from $k1$]
      Pr $(Q/G \& k)$ = 0 [The conjunction $(G \& k)$ entails that Q is false]
      Therefore, the product of the left-hand side of the plus sign is 0.

(24) Pr $(\sim G/k)$ = 0.5 [from $k2$]
      Pr $(Q/\sim G \& k)$ = 1 [$\sim G$ entails Q]
      Therefore, the product of the right-hand side of the plus sign is 0.5.

(25) (Therefore) Pr (Q/k) = 0.5

As was argued earlier, Pr (P/k) = 0.75. Therefore, by application of Bayes' Theorem, Pr $(Q/P \& k)$ = 0.666. This, Rowe believes, is a stronger argument than the one previously given for the view that P makes Q more likely than not. Furthermore, this conclusion, Rowe adds, accords with our intuitions on the matter, for it is clear that Pr (P/k) > Pr (Q/k), and if Pr (Q/k) = 0.5, then it follows that Pr $(Q/P \& k)$ > 0.5.

This argument in support of the inference from P to Q is clearly indebted to Rowe's new evidential argument, particularly premises (14) to (17). The success of the former argument is, therefore, dependant to some extent on the success of the latter, thus ensuring a degree of continuity between the middle and the later Rowe.

The above survey of Rowe's thinking on the evidential problem of evil has unearthed two separate arguments at work, the first of which was developed during his early and middle periods, while the second was introduced in more recent writings. I should stress, however, that the discussion that follows in the ensuing chapters will be restricted to criticisms or objections that are applicable to the evidential argument developed by the early and middle Rowe. This is not to say that what follows is entirely irrelevant to Rowe's most recent evidential argument. For despite the different ways in which Rowe has developed the evidential argument, there remains much in common between his various formulations, thus enabling critics to raise objections that bear upon all variants of the argument. Indeed, the central insight motivating Rowe's evidential arguments has remained the same. As Rowe puts it, "when we consider horrendous evils or the sheer magnitude of human and animal suffering, the idea that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being is in control of the world may strike us as absolutely astonishing, something almost beyond belief."[81] It is time to consider whether theism is in fact defenceless in the face of the evidential challenge mounted by Rowe.

NOTES

[1]   James Sennett, "The Inscrutable Evil Defense against the Inductive Argument from Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 10 (1993): 220.

[2]   Christlieb, "Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of Evil?" *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 47; cf Daniel Howard-Snyder, "God, Evil, and Suffering," in Michael J. Murray (ed.), *Reason for the Hope Within* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 17.

[3]   Rowe, "God and Other Minds," *Noûs* 3 (1969): 259–84.

[4]   *Ibid*., p. 271.

[5]   *Ibid*., p. 272.

[6]   *Ibid*.

[7]   Rowe, "Plantinga on Possible Worlds and Evil," *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973): 554–55.

[8]   *Ibid*., p. 555.

[9]   *Ibid*.

[10]   Rowe's "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" was originally published in *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–41. It has since found its way into various anthologies, including the following: Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 126–37; R. Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 33–42; Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, pp. 1–11; Kelly J. Clark (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000), pp. 229–37; and Charles Taliaferro and Paul J. Griffiths (eds), *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 368–74.

[11]   Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 95–100.

[12]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," in Robert Audi and William Wainwright (eds), *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 227–47.

[13]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 335.

[14]   *Ibid*., p. 336; cf. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 1st ed. (Encino, CA: Dickenson Publishing Company, 1978), p. 87, and "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 228. When presented in this way, Rowe's argument appears to be a deductive one. But as will be seen shortly, an important inductive step lies behind premise (1), thus rendering the conclusion probably true, not conclusively true. Some commentators, however, have overlooked this point, and have therefore classified Rowe's argument as a logical, not evidential, argument. See, for example, Nicholas Everitt, *The Non-Existence of God* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 229 and fn. 1 (p. 309).

[15]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 336.

[16]   *Ibid*., p. 336, fn. 3.

[17]   *Ibid*., p. 336.

[18]   *Ibid*., p. 337.

[19]   Ivan says of a five-year-old girl subjected to extreme torture by her parents that "the entire universe of knowledge is not worth the tears of that little child addressed to 'dear Father God' " (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. David McDuff (London: Penguin, 1993 [first published in 1880]), Book V, ch. 4, p. 278).

[20]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 337. However, in his 1986 paper, "The Empirical Argument from Evil" (p. 228, fn. 3), Rowe conceded that (2) is not as obviously true as originally thought, for a number of theists had by that time either questioned or rejected (2).

[21]   Rowe's argument in support of the factual premise is first stated in *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 1st ed., pp. 88–89. The case for (1) is developed further in "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," pp. 337–38; "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," pp. 95–96; and "The Empirical Argument from Evil," pp. 227–35.

[22]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 337.

[23]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 119.

[24]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 337.

[25]   *Ibid*., p. 338.

[26]   These five points are listed in Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 338, fn. 5; "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," p. 96; and "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 235.

[27]   Rowe, "Grounds for Belief Aside, Does Evil Make Atheism More Reasonable than Theism," in Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 127–28, emphases his.

[28]   See Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," in Clark (ed.), *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 239–40, 247–48, fn. 8.

[29]   Cf. Melville Y. Stewart, *The Greater-Good Defence: An Essay on the Rationality of Faith* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 7, where the key premise of the evidential argument from evil is said to be: "If there is a great abundance of evil in the world, then it is probable that some of it is gratuitous." Note, however, that Rowe, in the second of the two above readings, is making a slightly different assumption, viz.: the more instances of *apparently pointless* evil there are, the more likely it is that there is in fact pointless evil. This assumption has been criticized on the grounds that the existence of genuinely gratuitous evil can only be established by identifying particular cases of such evil – see, for example, Bruce Reichenbach, "The Inductive Argument from Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1980): 226, and Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 86. Even if this criticism were granted (and I doubt it should), Rowe can be thought of as relying on a different kind of assumption, viz.: if every evil does in fact serve a God-justifying good, it would not seem to us that many evils do not serve any such goods. Assumptions of this sort, called 'noseeum assumptions' in the literature, will be discussed in Chapters 4–8.

[30]   Cf. Peter van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 69, where Rowe is taken to be arguing from particular cases of evil. It is perhaps more common, however, to read the early Rowe's argument as oscillating between considerations relating to the quantity of evil and considerations relating to particular instances of evil – see, for example, David Conway, "The Philosophical Problem of Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988): 59–60, incl. fn. 36; Chris L. Hancock and Brendan Sweetman, *Truth and Religious Belief: Conversations on Philosophy of Religion* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), pp. 72–75; and Howard-Snyder, "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," pp. 247–48, fn. 8. However, in personal correspondence (dated March 7, 2002) Rowe advised that he intended his case in support of the factual premise to be predicated on the *vast quantity* of intense, inscrutable suffering.

[31]   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle," pp. 76–83, and "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p. 127.

[32]   See Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," p. 96.

[33]   See Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 244.

[34]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 337, emphases mine.

[35]   Cf. Michael Martin's summary of Rowe's argument in support of the factual premise in *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, p. 340. The existence of these various readings only serves to underscore the fact that this aspect of Rowe's argument is not entirely clear, a problem that is rectified by Rowe during his middle period.

[36]   Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," p. 123. As Russell points out, this case resembles the horrific evils recounted by Ivan Karamazov in Book V, ch. 4 of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*.

[37]   Rowe introduces these abbreviations in "Evil and Theodicy," p. 120.

[38]   See Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," p. 32.

[39]   Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p. 264.

[40]   Terry Christlieb, "Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of Evil?" p. 47.

[41]   This is not to deny, however, that the middle Rowe's argument shares the same ambiguity found in the early Rowe's argument as to whether an appeal is being made to particular evils or to the amount of evil (see Section 1.3 above).

[42]   This inference is first advanced in Rowe's "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 120–21, and is subsequently repeated in "Ruminations about Evil," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 72, and in "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," in Thomas D. Senor (ed.), *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith: Essays in Honor of William P. Alston* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 89–91.

[43]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 123. On the notion of intrinsic goodness, see fn. 33 of Chapter 9.

[44]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 264, and "God and Evil," *Philosophic Exchange: Annual Proceedings* 28 (1998): 7. A further point of clarification with regard to *P* is made by Plantinga, who observes that a more precise formulation of *P* would be:

  P*: No good we know of *is such that we know that it* justifies an omnipotent, omniscient being in permitting *E*1 and *E*2.

Without the italicized phrase, *P* could be false even though some good we know of justifies God in permitting *E*1 and *E*2, for we may not know that it does (*Warranted Christian Belief*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 465, fn. 9).

[45]   I here draw on Rowe's answer to this question in "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 264–65.

[46]   Rowe's refusal to read *P* in terms of a subjunctive conditional like P′ has come under fire by some, most notably by William Alston in "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 313–14.

[47]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 120, emphasis his.

[48]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 121, 123, and "Ruminations about Evil," p. 72. The point here, as Rowe emphasizes, is that "we cannot even *conceive* of goods that may occur and would justify God in permitting the terrible evils that afflict our world" ("Grounds for Belief Aside," p. 157, emphasis his).

[49]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 265.

[50]   See Jeff Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 437.

[51]   See Gilbert Harman, "Inference to the Best Explanation," *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 88–95.

[52]   Only if Harman's view (in the paper cited in fn. 51) that all enumerative inductions are at bottom inferences to the best explanation is granted will Jordan's proposal have some merit.

[53]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 123.

[54]   Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 73.

[55]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 126.

[56]   See Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 437. Paul Draper also presents Rowe's argument in this way ("Probabilistic Arguments from Evil," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 310–11).

[57]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 262–63.

[58]   This accords with Rowe's statement of the argument in various writings from his middle period. See, for example, Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," pp. 72–73, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 2nd. ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993), p. 80, and "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," pp. 71–72.

[59]   Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 87, fn. 4.

[60]   Other writings by Rowe from this period that cast some light on the formulation of his new evidential argument include: "Reply to Plantinga," *Noûs* 32 (1998): 545–52, "God and Evil," pp. 5–15, and "Grounds for Belief Aside," pp. 124–37. Interestingly, Richard Otte contends that Rowe, during his 1998 exchange with Plantinga, offered a new evidential argument that cannot be equated with his 1996 argument – see Otte, "Rowe's Probabilistic Argument from Evil," p. 147. It is also worth pointing out that Rowe has recently advanced an entirely new evidential argument in "Evil and God's Freedom in Creation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1999): 101–13. His argument here is based on the Leibnizian premise that if theism is true, then the actual world must be the best (or one of the best) of all worlds God can create. I assess this argument in "Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil: Problems and Prospects," *Sophia* 45 (2006): 57–77.

[61]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 263.

[62]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 270. However, in other writings from his most recent period, Rowe formulates the argument from evil by employing all three premises present in his 1979 formulation. See, for example, Rowe's "God and Evil," p. 5, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd. ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001), p. 99, and "Grounds for Belief Aside," p. 126.

[63]   Rowe's discussion of background information takes place in Section II, pp. 265–66 of "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look."

[64]   Rowe refers to this assumption on p. 271 of "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look." This formulation of LPA is indebted to Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 441. LPA, of course, forms the backbone of the methodology employed in the present study, as discussed in Chapter 1, Section 2.

[65]   Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 438. Jordan likens this neutral space to Rawls' 'original position', where contracting parties assume a veil of ignorance depriving them of much of what they would otherwise believe and know. See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999 [originally published in 1971]), ch. III, esp. §24.

[66]   Rowe, in fact, believes that the prior probability of G/k should be taken to be less than 0.5, given that the information we possess concerning the abundance of various evils in the world renders G unlikely and that the weight of this information is not counterbalanced by the other information in k. He prefers, however, to put this view aside and begin with a 0.5 reading "for purposes of finding a starting-point for the 'theist-nontheist' dialogue" ("The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 283, fn. 10).

67   The strategy of using the 'G.E. Moore shift' to respond to an evidential argument from evil will be discussed in Chapter 13.

68   Rowe addresses these questions in Section IV, pp. 267–70 of "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look."

69   Jordan mistakenly takes Rowe to have assigned a prior probability value of 0.5 to Pr ($P/\sim G$ & k). See Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 438 [refer to Jordan's ($k4$)].

70   In "God and Evil" (pp. 9–10), Rowe supports this conclusion by means of the following example: Suppose that we are unsure whether Smith will be in town this evening, so that it is just as likely that he will be out of town this evening as that he will be in town. Suppose, further, that we know that if Smith is in town it is just as likely that he will be at the concert this evening as that he will not be. We later discover that he is not at the concert. Having discovered this, the likelihood that he is out of town must increase, as does the likelihood that he is somewhere else in town. But since it was equally likely that he is out of town as in town, if the likelihood that he is out of town goes up it then becomes greater than 0.5, with the result that it is probable that he is not in town. Thus, although it is logically possible that he is somewhere else in town, it is more likely that he is not in town than that he is in town.

Similar reasoning, argues Rowe, can be employed in the case of God and evil. Suppose that, on the information we have prior to considering the problem of evil, it is equally likely that God exists as that God does not exist. We then consider some terrible evil such as $E1$. Suppose that, before considering this evil, we take it to be just as likely as not that the good that justifies God (if he exists) in permitting $E1$ is known to us as that it is unknown to us. We then examine the known goods in relation to $E1$ and arrive at the conclusion that no known good plays that justifying role. But this discovery parallels our discovery that Smith is not at the concert, and the result is the same: it is then more probable than not that God does not exist. (This example is repeated in Rowe's "Grounds for Belief Aside," pp. 133–34.).

71   Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 282.

72   *Ibid.*, emphasis his.

73   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 271–74.

74   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 131–32.

75   Rowe also distinguishes these two arguments from evil in "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Response to Wykstra," p. 100, and "The Empirical Argument from Evil," pp. 245–47.

76   Plantinga, "Degenerate Evidence and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 531.

77   Jordan, "Blocking Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 437; Jordan is quoting from Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 267. Cf. Michael Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 35 (2001): 278.

78   See the last two paragraphs of Section II in Rowe's "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 267. William Alston, however, has correctly understood Rowe on this matter – see Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 312.

79   See Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," pp. 45–47, and Rowe, "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," pp. 89–91.

80   Rowe's argument that P makes Q more likely than not can be found in "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 269–70. Rowe has also put forward a new argument for the view that P makes Q more likely than it would otherwise be – see "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 266–67.

81   Rowe, "Atheism," in Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 1, pp. 533–34.

As it is written:
'No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him.'

<div align="right">(1 Corinthians 2: 9)</div>

4.   WHAT NO EYE HAS SEEN: THE EPISTEMIC FOUNDATIONS OF WYKSTRA'S CORNEA CRITIQUE

Theism, particularly as expressed within the Judeo-Christian and Islamic religions, has always emphasized the inscrutability of the ways of God. In Romans 11: 33–34, for example, the apostle Paul exclaims: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord?"[1] This emphasis on mystery and the epistemic distance between God and human persons is a characteristic tenet of traditional forms of theism. It is in the context of this tradition that Stephen Wykstra developed his well-known CORNEA critique of Rowe's evidential arguments. The heart of Wykstra's critique is that, given our cognitive limitations, we are in no position to judge as improbable the statement that there are goods beyond our ken secured by God's permission of many of the evils we find in the world. This position – now often labelled 'sceptical theism' – has generated a great deal of discussion, leading some to conclude that "the inductive argument from evil is in no better shape than its late lamented deductive cousin."[2] The challenge posed by this theistic form of scepticism will be the focus of Chapters 4–8, with the present and the next chapter concentrating on the critique advanced by Wykstra.

Wykstra's CORNEA critique can be criticized on two fronts. First, one may argue that CORNEA, as a principle of rationality or epistemic justification, is defective in some significant way. Second, one may contend that even if the principle of CORNEA were accepted, this would present no difficulties for Rowe's case for atheism. Whereas the former approach focuses on CORNEA as an epistemological theory, the latter approach is concerned with CORNEA's application to the evidential argument from evil. I will begin with the former strategy, as this in a sense concentrates on the more fundamental issues. For if CORNEA *qua* epistemic principle is

irremediably defective, then it cannot be deployed against Rowe's argument, regardless of its utility in this regard.

1 THE ORIGINAL CORNEA

Wykstra gave birth to CORNEA in 1984, specifically in Section 3 of his paper, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Evil," where it was put forward in the following way:

> (C_1) On the basis of cognized situation s, human H is entitled to claim 'It appears that p' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if p were not the case, s would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.[3]

I have dubbed this principle 'C_1', for as will be seen shortly, it undergoes a number of transformations in the hands of others. For Wykstra, C_1 expresses a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for one's being entitled to claim that 'It appears that p'. Since C_1 addresses the issue of whether it is reasonable to think that one has 'epistemic access' to the truth of p through s, it is named by Wykstra 'CORNEA', short for 'Condition Of ReasoNable Epistemic Access'.

A few points of explanation may be in order before proceeding any further. First, by 'cognized situation' Wykstra appears to have in mind that which inclines one to believe something. For example, while standing in front of a palm tree I have that characteristic sort of experience that comes with perceiving a tree; to borrow Roderick Chisholm's phrase, I have the experience of 'being appeared treely to'. It is this experience that constitutes my 'cognized situation', for it plays a crucial role in the formation of my belief that I am perceiving a tree.

Second, the requirement that it be reasonable for H to believe that if p were not the case, s (i.e., H's cognized situation) would be different than it is in some discernible respect is not intended to be read as the requirement that H believe this in a conscious or occurrent manner. Rather, Wykstra only requires that "should the matter be put to H, it would be reasonable for her to affirm that the condition is satisfied: that is, no norms of reasonable belief would be violated by her believing this."[4]

What considerations does Wykstra offer in support of C_1? He holds that an initial degree of plausibility is conferred on C_1 by the following three cases:

> (a) You look through a doorway in search of a table. Although the room is extremely large, it is cluttered with bulldozers, dead elephants,

and all manner of vision-obstructing objects. Seeing no table from the doorway, should you say, 'It does not appear that there is a table in the room'?

(b) You suffer from a headcold and, as you are aware, this robs you of your sense of smell. After taking out the carton of milk from the refrigerator, you open it and smell it to see if it has gone sour. Since you have not detected any characteristic odour of milk gone bad, should you assert, 'It does not appear that the milk is sour'?

(c) You are giving a philosophy graduate seminar on Plato and in attendance is the Dean of College, who has never studied philosophy or ancient Greek. On various occasions you read a sentence from the original Greek of Plato's texts, but the Dean is unable to follow what you are saying. Of such a sentence, is the Dean entitled to say, 'It does not appear that this sentence has any meaning'?

Wykstra points out that each of these questions must be answered in the negative, and this, he argues, confers some support to C_1.[5] He does not stop there, however, but attempts to undergird C_1 further by providing it with a general epistemological rationale.

In providing such a rationale, Wykstra thinks it instructive to begin with Swinburne's account of the epistemic sense of 'appears'.[6] Swinburne, following in the footsteps of Chisholm, distinguishes the epistemic from the comparative uses of such verbs as 'seems', 'looks', 'sounds', 'feels', 'smells', and the like.[7] To use these words in their comparative sense is to compare the way an object looks with the way other objects normally look. For instance, looking at a coin on the table from an angle I may say 'The coin looks elliptical', and by this I mean 'The coin looks the way elliptical things normally look'. However, to use words like 'looks' or 'appears' in their epistemic sense is to describe what the subject is inclined to believe on the basis of her present sensory experience. If, for example, I say 'The ship appears to be moving', I am saying that:

(i) I am inclined to believe that the ship is moving, and
(ii) It is my present sensory experience that leads me to have this inclination to belief.

Thus, Swinburne's account of the epistemic variety of 'appears' locutions consists in explicating such locutions in terms of clauses like (i) and (ii).

Wykstra argues that Swinburne's account stands in need of modification in two respects. First of all, his account must be broadened so as not to be restricted to 'sensory-epistemic appearings', that is, belief-inclinations

triggered by sensory experiences. For we often find ourselves with belief-inclinations arising from a broad and largely tacit range of considerations being brought to bear upon our cognized situations. Any account of the epistemic sense of 'appears' must also leave room for such 'cognitive-epistemic appearings'. Indeed, it is this sense of 'appears', contends Wykstra, that is at work in Rowe's argument, for Rowe is appealing not to sensory experience, but to a cognized situation which produces (via a range of considerations) a strong inclination to believe a proposition about suffering (viz., that it serves no outweighing good).[8]

Wykstra identifies a further and more significant way in which Swinburne's account can be improved. Assuming that (i) and (ii) are construed as individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being entitled to claim 'It appears that p', then C_1 would turn out to be false, for conditions (i) and (ii) could be met while the condition expressed by C_1 remains unfulfilled. C_1, therefore, presupposes the addition of a third clause:

(iii) I 'take' there to be an evidential connection between what I am inclined to believe and the cognized situation that inclines me to believe it.

Clause (ii) involves a causal connection between my experience and my belief-inclination, whereas (iii) adds an evidential connection. To illustrate the difference made by adding (iii), Wykstra offers the following illustration:

Imagine a man, Mort, who is inclined to believe "this woman hates me" of any woman who, in conversing with him, does not constantly smile. Suppose further that Mort has, through psychoanalysis, become fully conscious that this belief-forming disposition is completely unreliable, and is the result of certain psychological traumas in his childhood. Now, talking with a normal woman (i.e., one who doesn't constantly smile), Mort once again feels in himself the familiar inclination to believe the woman hates him; but he also lucidly knows that this inclination is pathological, and is not due to the woman's behavior in any way "evidencing" hatred of him.[9]

On Swinburne's account, Mort would be entitled to claim 'This woman appears to hate me', as conditions (i) and (ii) have been met. By contrast, on Wykstra's account, it would not be correct for Mort to assert this, for he no longer takes there to be an evidential connection between the woman's behaviour and what he is inclined to believe.

Wykstra's original version of CORNEA can, therefore, be seen as comprising the following two principles:

> *The Taking Condition*: H is entitled to claim that it appears that *p* on the basis of cognized situation *s* only if it is reasonable for H to take it that there is an evidential connection between *p* and *s*.

> *The Discernible Difference Principle*: It is reasonable for H to take it that there is an evidential connection between *p* and *s* only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were *p* false, *s* would likely be discernibly different to H in some way.[10]

"The rationale for CORNEA," writes Wykstra, "derives from the 'taking' clause,"[11] as expressed by clause (iii) or The Taking Condition above. For according to C_1, if I assert 'It appears that *p*', what I am saying (among other things) is that there is an evidential connection between what I am inclined to believe (viz., that *p*) and the cognized situation that inclines me to believe it. If it is not reasonable for me to take this evidential connection to obtain, then I am not entitled to assert 'It appears that *p*'.

But what does Wykstra base The Taking Condition on? His Mort example seems to lend some support to it, but he is careful to point out that this example is not intended as a justification of The Taking Condition. Wykstra does not go into any detail as to how his proposal could be justified, except to make the following comment:

> The heart of the matter … is that since we want the epistemic sense of 'appears' to cover just those situations to which principles of epistemic justification (like Swinburne's principle of credulity) apply, those occasions will be ones which, though characterizable 'internally', nevertheless involve 'takings' of the sort that my third clause makes explicit. The case for this has been developed in several papers by Roderick Chisholm.[12]

In the papers by Chisholm referred to by Wykstra, the notion of 'taking' is employed for the purpose of elucidating some epistemic principles or concepts.[13] It is far from clear, however, how this justifies Wykstra in appealing to 'takings' when putting forward CORNEA. Indeed, some versions of CORNEA appear to make no reference at all to implicit 'takings'.[14]

But perhaps Wykstra's point is that what Chisholm has shown is that epistemic principles relating to justification are best construed in internalist terms. According to internalist accounts of justification, all of the factors

needed for a belief to be epistemically justified for a given person must be cognitively accessible to that person. Externalist accounts, by contrast, hold that at least some of the justifying factors need not be accessible to the believer in question. If one adopts the internalist perspective, The Taking Condition naturally follows. For to be justified in claiming 'It appears that p' one must be aware (or be capable of becoming aware) of the justifying factor, and this amounts to the requirement that one must reasonably take there to be an evidential connection between p and one's cognized situation.[15]

2   THE PROBLEM WITH C_1

Responses to C_1 have ranged from questioning Wykstra's meaning analysis of the epistemic use of 'appears' locutions to advancing counterexamples to C_1.[16] Irrespective of the prospects of these responses, there remains a more fundamental difficulty with CORNEA as originally formulated by Wykstra.

As we have seen, Wykstra, in proposing C_1, aims at setting forth the conditions under which one is entitled to assert such propositions as:

(1) It appears that there is a table in the room,
(2) It appears that the milk is sour.

These propositions are expressions of one's beliefs about one's own current states of consciousness. In asserting (1), for example, I would be stating that it seems to me that there is a table in the room. To be sure, I could be mistaken in thinking that there is a table in the room, for I could be hallucinating or the victim of an illusion. But how could I be mistaken about believing that I *seem* to see a table? As Descartes put the matter,

> I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false.[17]

Similarly, Roderick Chisholm maintains that *appear* statements such as 'I am now appeared to in a way which is blue' are certain or, at least, cannot express any error or mistake.[18] Propositions such as (1) and (2), therefore, appear to enjoy a kind of immunity from error. Following Plantinga, one may say they are 'incorrigible', where a proposition p is incorrigible for a person S if and only if (a) it is not possible that S believe p and p be false, and (b) it is not possible that S believe ~p and p be true.[19]

Many philosophers, however, reject the view that we cannot be mistaken as to whether we are currently in a certain kind of conscious state, or that we have 'privileged access' to certain of our own states of mind. David Armstrong, for example, puts forward the hypothetical case of a brain technician who, in virtue of his perfect understanding of the correlation between states of my brain and my inner experiences, is justified in preferring his neural readings over my reports as to what I am thinking, feeling, or sensing at the moment.[20] Despite such objections, it remains the case that we have a high degree of cognitive access to our own experiences and states of mind. As William Alston has shown, the notion of privileged access can be developed so that first-person beliefs regarding current mental states, although not immune from error, doubt, or refutation, are nonetheless 'self-warranted'.[21] For present purposes, therefore, there is no need to insist on incorrigibility, as weaker epistemic notions would fill the bill equally well.

Returning to Wykstra's three examples (involving the search for a table in a cluttered room, the headcold sufferer's sour milk, and the meaningfulness of a philosopher's utterances), these were put forward in illustration of the supposed unreasonableness of claiming 'It appears that p' in certain circumstances. However, if the foregoing analysis of *appear* statements is correct, Wykstra has shown nothing of the sort. For in each of Wykstra's examples, one would clearly be entitled to make the initial 'appears' claim. It is the inference from the 'appears' claim to any further claim regarding how things really are that must be questioned. For instance, the headcold sufferer cannot be faulted for stating that, 'It appears that the milk is not sour'. However, she would be mistaken as well as unreasonable if she inferred from this that the milk is not in fact sour.

This failure on Wykstra's behalf to recognize that propositions such as (1) and (2) merely report one's mental life is what lends his original version of CORNEA its peculiar character. Such formulations of CORNEA embody a deep-seated confusion regarding the use of 'appears' locutions in their epistemic sense. A person is entitled to assert a statement containing these locutions as long as she is inclined to accept the statement on the basis of some cognized situation. This, indeed, accords with Swinburne's analysis of 'appears', 'looks', and like verbs. Furthermore, if a person is entitled or justified in accepting a statement such as (1) or (2), then that statement would be incorrigible or at least self-warranted. Against this backdrop, it is implausible to claim, as does Wykstra in his original formulation of CORNEA, that a person is justified in making an *appear* statement p on the condition that it is reasonable for her to believe that, if p were not the case, her cognized situation would be discernibly different. Once we are clear

about the logic of *appear* statements, this condition is seen to be not only unnecessary, but also groundless.

Wykstra, as we have seen, attempts to ground the aforementioned condition in the notion of 'taking'. He claims that, to be entitled to make an *appear* statement, I must be justified in 'taking' there to be an evidential connection between what I am inclined to believe and the cognized situation that inclines me to believe it. This, however, is false, as can be shown by means of Wykstra's own example involving Mort. Due to some traumatic experiences in his childhood, when Mort converses with a woman he has a strong inclination to believe that the woman hates him. However, the fact that Mort knows that this inclination is pathological does not render his *appear* statement, 'This woman appears (to me) to hate me', unjustified or unwarranted. Indeed, given his past experiences, it is only to be expected that he would assert this, and his assertion would be justified and unmistakably correct. What he is not warranted in stating under these circumstances is: 'This woman in fact hates me'.

The foregoing criticism of C_1, however, is not applicable to the kind of *appear* statements employed in Rowe's evidential arguments. The *appears* claim made by Rowe is, of course, (*P*): 'No good we know of morally justifies God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$', a statement sometimes translated by Rowe as 'It appears that these evils are pointless'. But such *appear* statements are clearly not incorrigible or self-warranted. Indeed, the entire point behind theodicies is to show that Rowe's premise (*P*) is false. Perhaps, then, Chisholm's category of epistemic-appear statements may be divided into those that employ the phenomenal or Cartesian sense of 'appears', as in statements (1) and (2), which can be classified as incorrigible or self-warranted, and those that employ the evidential sense of 'appears', as in Rowe's premise (*P*), which only have an initial or *prima facie* degree of plausibility that can be defeated. Wykstra, therefore, may readily admit that C_1 is inapplicable to phenomenal-appear statements, but he may insist that C_1 retains its applicability to evidential-appear statements. But this would be a mistake, for as I intend to show in the following Section, the primary function of CORNEA is to tell us when inferences, rather than statements, of a certain sort are warranted.

3   CORNEA AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CREDULITY

It may be worthwhile at this stage to relate CORNEA to a neighbouring epistemic principle, viz., the Principle of Credulity. The relationship between these two principles can be clarified by looking at the implications of the foregoing discussion for Rowe's evidential argument. Sceptical theists who

have devised principles like CORNEA in response to Rowe have not been concerned with Rowe's claim that there appears to be no greater good secured by God's permission of horrendous evil. In their eyes, what is crucial is whether Rowe is entitled to infer, from this *appears* claim, that there are genuinely pointless evils. And so it is the inference from apparent to genuine pointlessness that CORNEA must address if it is to have any plausibility. Wykstra, then, places the focus on the wrong segment of Rowe's argument when stating that "Rowe's inference must be questioned at its first step. To grant (1.9) [There appears to be no good for which God allows the fawn's suffering] lets Rowe not just in the game but ninety-nine yards down the field."[22]

This problem, however, is rectified in the version of CORNEA adopted by Wykstra in relation to the middle Rowe's evidential argument:

(C_2) Person *S* is entitled to draw the inference from A to B only if *S* has no reason to believe that if not-B, *S*'s situation would likely be the same as A asserts.

This account of CORNEA is concerned, not with the first step of Rowe's argument, viz., *P*, but with the inference from *P* to *Q*.[23] In similar fashion, Bruce Langtry holds that the following principle, which he dubs 'IRIS', more accurately expresses the original intent behind CORNEA:

(C_3) Human H is entitled to infer 'There is no *x*' from 'I do not perceive any *x*' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that if there were an *x* then she would probably perceive an *x*.[24]

And Daniel Howard-Snyder restates CORNEA in terms of the inference, 'So far as we can tell, *p*; therefore, *p*'. For as he points out, when one utters, 'It appears (or seems) that there is no elephant in the room', one might well mean nothing more than what is typically meant by, 'So far as I can see (or tell), there is no elephant in the room'. Howard-Snyder, therefore, reconstructs CORNEA as follows:

(C_4) On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer *p* from 'so far as I can tell, *p*' only if it is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were *p* false, what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, *p*' would likely be different than it is in some way discernible by her.[25]

Some parallels may be drawn between such versions of CORNEA and the Principle of Credulity (PC, for short). The latter was introduced by

Richard Swinburne as part of an attempt at showing that putative experiences of God constitute good evidence for the existence of God. Swinburne states PC as follows:

> (PC) In the absence of special considerations, if it seems (epistemically) to a person S that x is present, then probably x is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so.[26]

According to PC, my experience of seeming to see a rose flower is good *prima facie* evidence for supposing that there is a flower before me. This is not to assume that my experience entails the existence of its purported object, for the evidence conferred by this experience can be defeated. Nevertheless, my initial perception must be taken to be innocent until proven guilty, otherwise some form of global scepticism becomes inevitable. For this reason, PC is characterized by Swinburne as a basic principle of rationality not itself further justifiable.[27] Rowe also thinks of PC in this way:

> That things appear to us to be a certain way is itself justification for thinking things are this way … If in order to be justified in moving from appearances to reality we had always first to justify a principle linking the two, we would be hard put to avoid skepticism.[28]

PC and versions of CORNEA such as C_2–C_4 are alike in that they purport to state the conditions under which inferences of the form 'It appears that p; therefore, p' are admissible. At least one way in which they differ is in their specification of these conditions. In the above statement of PC, the relevant condition is broadly construed as 'in the absence of special considerations'. More specific suggestions, however, have been put forward. Rowe, for example, puts forward two conditions which, if not met, would vitiate the move from appearance to reality: we know how to discover positive reasons for thinking that S's experience is delusive (if such reasons do exist), and we lack any positive reason for thinking that S's experience is delusive.[29] Swinburne, likewise, offers four specific considerations which may lead one to hold that, although it seemed to S that x was present, in fact x was not present. For example, it may be shown that the apparent perception of x was made under conditions or by a subject found in the past to be unreliable.[30] By contrast, CORNEA as exemplified by C_2–C_4 takes the relevant condition to be 'it is reasonable for S to believe that if p were false, S's cognized situation would likely be different than it is'.

The two principles are thus different in an important respect, which may be summarized as follows:

CORNEA allows person *S* to make the inference from A (We see no *x*) to B (There is no *x*) only if *S* has no reason to believe that if not-B, A would likely be true anyway.
PC allows *S* to make the inference from A (It seems to me that *x* is present) to B (*x* is present) only if certain conditions are met – that is, *S* has no reason to believe that not-B.

This raises the question as to which principle is the correct one, or the one most relevant to Rowe's evidential argument. Does Rowe need to satisfy PC or CORNEA (or both) in order to justify his inference from apparently gratuitous to genuinely gratuitous evils?

There is good reason, I think, for taking PC to be inapplicable in the case of Rowe's argument. Swinburne has remarked that the point of PC is that how things seem positively to be is evidence of how they are. He adds, however, that PC does not tell us that how things seem *not* to be is evidence of how things are not.[31] PC, therefore, is applicable only to 'positive seemings' like 'There seems to be a table in this room'. From a statement such as this, it is reasonable for one to infer (provided there is no counterevidence) that 'There probably is a table in this room'. However, a 'negative seeming' such as 'There seems to be no table in this room' does not warrant the move to 'There probably is no table in this room', for this inference is permitted only if one has looked everywhere in the room and (assuming that one has, for instance, properly functioning vision) would have seen a table if one was there. Following Wykstra's terminology, such inferences involving negative judgments may be called 'noseeum' inferences: we no see 'um, so they ain't there![32] Rowe's inference from *P* to *Q*, like the foregoing inference from there seeming to be no table in the room, is a noseeum inference, but inferences of this nature call for a principle such as C_4 rather than PC.

Stephen Wykstra has objected to the distinction between positive and negative seemings, or between 'how things seem to be' and 'how things seem not to be'. He argues that this distinction lacks the epistemic bite Swinburne gives it because it is entirely dependent on our arbitrary choices of formulation. For example, the negative statement 'There is no table in this room' can also be construed positively as 'This room is bare or empty'.[33] Wykstra seems to be mistaken on this point. Let's look again at the two statements he mentions:

(3) There is no table in this room,
(4) The room is bare or empty.

These statements are clearly not equivalent, for (4) entails (3), but (3) does not entail (4). Thus, (4) is not a mere reformulation of (3), but a statement with different content. This is why any attempt to defeat (3) or to show that it is false would proceed differently from an attempt to defeat (4). To borrow an example used by Wykstra, if the room is the size of a Concord hangar and is replete with all manner of objects, it would be easy to disconfirm (4) but much harder to falsify (3). Defeating strategies, therefore, often vary according to whether a positive or negative assertion is being made, and this explains why Rowe's seemings are more adequately dealt with by a version of CORNEA such as C_4 than by PC.[34]

4   COUNTEREXAMPLES TO C_2–C_4

If, as I have argued, C_1 is inadequate as an epistemic principle, we must turn to other and perhaps more promising versions of CORNEA, particularly C_2–C_4. As these three varieties of CORNEA are not significantly dissimilar, I will focus almost exclusively on C_4 when discussing objections to revised versions of CORNEA, without assuming that these objections are not relevant to the other versions. The objections in question have mainly been expressed in terms of counterexamples. I will begin by outlining these counterexamples before showing in the following Section why they do not succeed. This, in turn, will lead to a better appreciation of the form CORNEA must assume if it is to be a plausible epistemic principle.

In the Russell-Wykstra co-authored piece, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue," the character Bea (who is generally the mouthpiece for Wykstra) considers the following 'noseeum rule': our not seeing something after careful looking gives us reason to believe it is not there. This rule, Bea argues, is not always correct. Suppose, for example, we are wondering whether there is a sandflea in the room. Having looked long and hard, we find no sandflea. This, however, does not give us reason to think there is in fact none in the room. The acceptability of the noseeum rule, therefore, depends on the following 'expectability principle':

> If the critter has low 'seeability' – if it is the kind of critter that, under the circumstances, you wouldn't expect to see even if it is there – then the noseeum rule is false: not seeing it is *not* evidence it's not there.[35]

This expectability principle closely resembles C_4, according to which one is entitled to infer from 'I see no sandflea in the room' that 'There is no sandflea

in the room' only if one has no reason to believe that even if a sandflea were present it is unlikely that it would be 'seeable'.

Athea (who represents Russell's views) protests that the expectability principle, or C_4, is false.[36] She offers a counterexample to C_4 which runs as follows:

Consider the following seemingly plausible principle:

If, given some evidence e, I am justified in believing some proposition p, and I know that p entails q, then given e, I am also justified in believing q.

Call this 'the transmission principle', or TP for short. Suppose that I now have the visual sensation of there being a table in front of me (call this my 'visual data'). Given this visual data, I am surely justified in believing that I see a table in front of me. Consider next the evil demon hypothesis, according to which there is an evil demon causing me to have sensations of a non-existent table. Now, if there is in fact a table in front of me, this entails that the demon hypothesis is false. Assuming that I know that this entailment holds, then by application of TP, I am justified in believing that the demon hypothesis is false. All this, Athea adds, "is really just common sense."[37]

If we accept CORNEA, however, we are forced to reject the above reasoning. The demon hypothesis makes it likely (indeed, it entails) that I would have precisely the same visual data that I do in fact have. But then, according to CORNEA, this visual data cannot be evidence justifying my belief that the demon hypothesis is false. However, I *am* justified in believing that the demon hypothesis is false. Therefore, CORNEA is false.[38]

Two further counterexamples are advanced by Howard-Snyder, the first of which runs as follows:

While at the zoo, you see in the zebra exhibit area what you take to be a zebra. It is broad daylight, your visual faculties are not defective, and you have no reason to think (nor should you have any reason to think) that what you see is not a zebra. However, the animal in question is actually a mule cleverly painted as a zebra. Although you have good evidence that there is a zebra before you, it is false that were a zebra not before you, what you have to go on would probably be discernibly different to you. Therefore, you are not entitled to infer that there is a zebra before you on the basis that, so far as you can tell, there is a zebra before you.[39]

Howard-Snyder's second counterexample to C_4 is stated thus:

> In the light of my present mental life, I believe that I exist. If the proposition 'I exist' were false, *I myself* would not discern a difference in my present mental life, since I would not exist. According to C_4, in a case such as this there is no evidential connection between my present conscious experience and the proposition 'I exist'. But if there is no such evidential connection, then by the lights of C_4 I am not entitled to claim 'I exist'. Clearly, however, I am entitled to think that I exist. C_4 must, therefore, be false.[40]

This example, according to Howard-Snyder, indicates that the problem with C_4 lies in its commitment to what he calls 'the subjunctive condition':

> (SC) There is an evidential connection between what H has to go on in claiming 'so far as she can tell, p' and p only if, given H's cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, were p false, what H has to go on would likely be discernibly different to H in some way.

According to C_4, H is entitled to infer p on the basis of what she has to go on in claiming 'so far as she can tell, p' only if it is reasonable for H to assume that there is an evidential connection between p and what she has to go on. The nature of this evidential connection is specified by SC. However, if SC were accepted, we would be led to the implausible view that our own mental lives are not even *prima facie* evidence for thinking that we exist. The only rational course of action to take is to reject SC and, by extension, C_4.[41]

5 C_4 AND NOSEEUM INFERENCES

To see where these counterexamples go wrong, it may firstly be pointed out that they have a misleading character in a way comparable to the three examples offered by Wykstra in support of his original version of CORNEA (involving the cluttered room, the headcold sufferer, and the philosopher's utterances). In each case, it is presumed that a belief of the form 'It appears that p' is being entertained. Howard-Snyder, for instance, assumes that while looking at the zebra exhibit, one forms the belief 'So far as I can tell, there is a zebra before me'. Similarly, Wykstra states that the headcold sufferer, after smelling the milk, forms the belief that it appears that the milk is not sour. This is, however, phenomenologically incorrect. Ordinarily, the belief that our cold sufferer would be inclined to hold, given her sensory

experience, is 'The milk is not sour.' Assuming that this belief is held confidently and without any significant degree of doubt, she would not express it in terms such as 'It appears that …' or 'So far as I can tell … .' Another way of putting the matter is that her belief that the milk is not sour is a basic or non-inferential belief, for her belief is not held (at least in any conscious manner) on the basis of other beliefs.

This is not to deny that C_4 is applicable to Wykstra's three hypothetical examples, but only to emphasize that it is applicable only as long as an inference is thought to have been made in each case from a 'negative seeming' such as 'I do not perceive any x' to 'There is no x.' On the other hand, an inference of this kind could not be involved in the counterexamples offered by Howard-Snyder and Russell, and so such cases are irrelevant to C_4. This brings us to the core problem with these counterexamples.[42]

Earlier it was argued that CORNEA, properly construed, is applicable only to noseeum inferences or inferences involving 'negative seemings.' Such inferences are often consciously made or at least are the result of a certain degree of deliberation or exploration. For example, after looking carefully in my refrigerator, I cannot find a carton of milk and so I infer that no carton of milk is in the refrigerator. Or, while viewing a chess match between two novices, Kasparov says to himself, 'So far as I can tell, there is no way for Susan to get out of check,' and then infers that there is in fact no way for her to get out of check. In both cases, a level of investigation or contemplation lies behind the noseeum inference. This, indeed, is the case with Rowe's inference from 'We can see no outweighing good for $E1$ and $E2$' to 'Probably, there is no outweighing good for these evils,' for this inference is the result of a number of considerations.

If we look, however, at the counterexamples to C_4 constructed by Russell and Howard-Snyder, these relate to 'positive seemings' such as 'So far as I can tell, there is a zebra before me' and 'So far as I can tell, I exist.' The inferences made in these contexts are not typically drawn in a conscious manner, nor do they generally presuppose a significant degree of deliberation or exploration. Such inferences, therefore, fall within the jurisdiction of PC rather than C_4.[43]

In light of the above, C_4 may be amended so as to make explicit reference to 'negative seemings':

($C_{4.1}$) On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer 'There is no x' from 'So far as I can tell, there is no x' only if:
It is reasonable for H to believe that, given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if there were an x, what she has

to go on in claiming 'So far as I can tell, there is no *x*' would likely be different in that she would probably perceive an *x*.

Simplifying the principle further so as to render it more readable, we have:

($C_{4.2}$) H is entitled to infer 'There is no *x*' from 'So far as I can tell, there is no *x*' only if:
It is reasonable for H to believe that *if there were an* x, *it is likely that she would perceive (or find, grasp, comprehend, conceive) it.*

The italicized portion may be called 'the noseeum assumption,' as anyone who employs a noseeum inference and is justified in doing so would be committed to this assumption.

$C_{4.2}$, or at least something quite like it, appears unobjectionable.[44] If, for instance, I am looking through the window of my twentieth-floor office to the garden below and I fail to see any caterpillars on the flowers, that would hardly entitle me to infer that there are in fact no caterpillars there. Likewise, if a beginner were viewing Kasparov play Deep Blue, it would be unreasonable for her to infer 'I can't see any way for Deep Blue to get out of check, so there is none.' Both inferences are illegitimate for the same reason: the person making the inference does not have what it takes to discern the sorts of things in question. It is this point that $C_{4.2}$ intends to capture by insisting that a noseeum inference is permissible only if it is likely that one would detect or discern the item in question if it existed. $C_{4.2}$ is also in keeping with Wykstra's concerns regarding the noseeum inference employed by Rowe in his evidential argument. I turn therefore to the application of CORNEA to Rowe's argument.[45]

NOTES

[1]   This and all other biblical quotations are taken from *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1985). The human mind's severely limited grasp of God's purposes is powerfully expressed in God's castigation of Job in chs 38–42 of the Book of Job; cf. Isa 55: 8–9, and 1 Cor 1: 25, 13: 12. Rowe also acknowledges that "the theist's own religious tradition usually maintains that in this life it is not given to us to know God's purpose in allowing particular instances of suffering" ("The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," pp. 338–39).

2   Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," p. 61. An influential precursor of the contemporary sceptical theist movement is M.B. Ahern's *The Problem of Evil* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), esp. ch. 5, where Ahern aims to show that, given our inadequate knowledge of goods, evils and their interconnections, it is impossible for the theist to show that all actual evil is justified, and similarly it is impossible for the nontheist to show that any actual evil is not justified.

3   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 85. Interestingly, in a paper published in 1983 ("The Problem with the Problem of Evil," *Sophia* 22 (1983): 30) Delmas Lewis foreshadowed Wykstra's CORNEA principle by noting that one may appeal to the following principle in order to support the factual premise of Rowe's evidential argument:

> (E) If there is a morally sufficient reason which explains why an omniscient, omnipotent being could not prevent some instance of evil without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse, then we would know it.

Lewis, however, incorrectly thought that Rowe would reject (E). See Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," pp. 242–45.

4   Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 87.

5   *Ibid.*, p. 84.

6   See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 245–55.

7   See Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), ch. 4. Chisholm, however, also identifies a third, non-comparative use of such verbs. According to this usage, when I say 'I am being appeared to redly' I am not comparing my experience with other experiences (e.g., 'I am being appeared to in the way in which I typically am when looking at a ripe tomato'), nor am I characterizing the experience in terms of its typical causes (e.g., 'I am being appeared to in a way that results when I am looking at a red object in normal circumstances'). Rather, I am reporting the intrinsic character or qualitative distinctiveness of the experience.

8   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 86.

9   *Ibid.*, pp. 85–86.

10   Cf. Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 32 (1992): 27–28.

11   Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 87.

12   *Ibid.*, p. 86.

13   For example, in *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (pp. 67–95) and in " 'Appear', 'Take', and 'Evident'," (in Robert J. Swartz (ed.), *Perceiving, Sensing, and Knowing*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965, pp. 473–85), Chisholm advances a criterion of evidence – that is, a criterion for determining when one can be said to have adequate evidence for a given proposition – that appeals to the notion of 'taking.' This notion also looms large in Chisholm's account of 'beyond reasonable doubt' in "On the Nature of Empirical Evidence," in George S. Pappas and Marshall Swain (eds), *Essays on Knowledge and Justification* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 253–78.

14   I am thinking here of Langtry's 'RETINA' and 'PUPIL' versions of CORNEA (see Langtry, "Eyeballing Evil: Some Epistemic Principles," *Philosophical Papers* 25 (1996): 134; also see fn. 45 below). Howard-Snyder, somewhat implausibly, claims that his reconstruction of

CORNEA (referred to as C_4 in the main text below) also makes no appeal to 'takings' ("Seeing through CORNEA," p. 29).

15   Related to internalism is the deontological conception of justification, according to which a person S is justified in believing p if and only if S has fulfilled some epistemic duty, or at least has not flouted any epistemic obligations, in believing that p. Although discussions of CORNEA typically take this view of justification for granted, it is a seriously defective view insofar as deontologically justified beliefs fail to hook up in the right way with adequate truth-conducive grounds. A defence of this position is given by William Alston in "Concepts of Epistemic Justification" and "The Deontological Conception of Justification," both of which can be found in his *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), see esp. pp. 95–96 and 147–49. Alvin Plantinga has for similar reasons rejected deontological justification as constituting even a necessary condition for warrant. See Plantinga, *Warrant: The Current Debate* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 45.

16   Howard-Snyder, for example, argues that not one of the three clauses constituting Wykstra's account of 'appears' locutions expresses an *epistemic* condition ("Seeing through CORNEA," p. 47, fn. 2). For some counterexamples to C_1, see Bruce Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 132–33, and Bruce Langtry, "Eyeballing Evil," p. 133.

17   Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, translated and edited by John Cottingham, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996 [originally published in Latin in 1641]), Second Meditation, p. 19, translator's emphasis.

18   See Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study*, pp. 63–66. For Chisholm, however, such statements are immune from error only when used in a non-comparative way (see fn. 7 above).

19   See Alvin Plantinga, "Reason and Belief in God," p. 58.

20   See David Armstrong, "Is Introspective Knowledge Incorrigible?" *Philosophical Review* 72 (1963): 419–20, 424–25.

21   See Alston, "Varieties of Privileged Access," and "Self-Warrant: A Neglected Form of Privileged Access," in *Epistemic Justification*, chs 10 (pp. 249–85) and 11 (pp. 286–315), respectively.

22   Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 128.

23   *Ibid*., p. 130.

24   See Langtry, "Eyeballing Evil," p. 128.

25   See Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," pp. 28–29. A similar formulation of CORNEA is defended by Bruce Russell:

(C_5) If (a) it appears to person S that A is not-B, and

(b) S has reason to believe that if C were D, A would appear to be not-B even if it were B, and

(c) S has reason to believe that C is D,

then S has no reason to believe that A is not-B on the basis of A's appearing to be not-B.

If, for example, it were the case that (a) a glass of milk has no sourness that I can discern, and (b) I have reason to believe that if I have a cold, the milk would have no sourness I could discern even if it were sour, and (c) I have reason to believe that I suffer from a cold, then my not discerning any sourness gives me no reason to think the milk is not sour. See Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," p. 133. In "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil," p. 149, Russell (through the character of Athea) presents a similar version of CORNEA, while in a more recent paper he

adopts a quite different CORNEA principle – see his "Why Doesn't God Intervene to Prevent Evil?" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Philosophy: The Quest for Truth*, 3rd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1996), pp. 74–80.

[26]   See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 254.

[27]   *Ibid*., pp. 254–56. Cf. Swinburne's "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1988): 292, where he calls PC "the supreme principle which guides rational belief on all matters." Not everyone, however, agrees – for example, Jonathan Kvanvig views PC as embodying an unacceptable form of infallibilism ("Credulism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 101–09) and Willem Drees rejects PC as being "either uninformative or wrong" (*Religion, Science and Naturalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 167).

[28]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 244.

[29]   See Rowe, "Religious Experience and the Principle of Credulity," pp. 90–91.

[30]   See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 260–65.

[31]   *Ibid*., pp. 254–55. I should note that Swinburne qualified this view in "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?" (p. 294, fn. 2), stating that negative seemings on empirical matters provide much shakier support to claims about how things are not than do positive seemings to how things are. However, by the time of *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (p. 22), Swinburne had come to view PC as applicable to positive and negative seemings alike.

[32]   Wykstra introduces this lingo in "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 126. Wykstra is drawing on the colloquial use of the word 'noseeum', according to which a noseeum refers to a tiny biting fly (less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch long, in fact) that often lives near water.

[33]   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," pp. 83–84.

[34]   However, the other example employed by Wykstra – 'There are no clothes on that woman' and 'That woman is naked' – is free from the difficulties mentioned here. Nevertheless, the distinction between positive and negative seemings, like any distinction, need not be exceptionless in order to be valid or informative.

[35]   Russell and Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue," p. 143, emphasis in the original.

[36]   *Ibid*., pp. 148–49.

[37]   *Ibid*., p. 148.

[38]   TP is, of course, controversial – it is rejected, for example, by Langtry, "Eyeballing Evil," pp. 129–30, and Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil," pp. 152–54.

[39]   See Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," p. 35.

[40]   *Ibid*., p. 35. Howard-Snyder attributes this counterexample to John-O'Leary Hawthorne.

[41]   Howard-Snyder's preferred strategy for handling these counterexamples consists in revising C_4 along the lines of 'relevant alternative situations':

   (C_{RA}) On the basis of what she has to go on, H is entitled to infer p from 'so far as I can tell, p' only if: given her cognitive faculties and the use she has made of them, if p were not the case *in relevant alternative situations,* what she had to go on in claiming 'so far as I can tell, p' would probably be different than it is in some way discernible by her.

(Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," pp. 36–37; cf. Alvin Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986, pp. 45–47). Thus, the zebra objection can be met by noting that a mule cleverly disguised as a zebra on a rare occasion does

not count as a relevant alternative situation. C_{RA} also enables the 'I exist' case to be side-stepped, for "one's occurrent mental life would be different in such a way that a reasonable person would not be inclined to believe she exists in relevant alternative situations in which she fails to exist" (Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," p. 49, fn. 22). It will be argued, however, that this revision of C_4 is unnecessary as the counterexamples that prompted it are flawed at a fundamental level. Furthermore, C_{RA} requires an underlying theory of relevance that does not succumb to the difficulties often troubling relevant alternative theories of knowledge (cf. Jonathan Schaffer, "Knowledge, Relevant Alternatives and Missed Clues," *Analysis* 61 (2001): 202–08).

[42]   Perhaps this is a little uncharitable to Russell, for the counterexample he offers can be construed as a 'negative seeming' of the following sort: 'So far as we can tell, there is no evil demon,' or (to borrow the example used by Russell in a recent paper) 'So far as we can tell, we are not in The Matrix' – see Russell, "The Problem of Evil: Why Is There So Much Suffering?" in Louis P. Pojman (ed.), *Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 209. I assume, however, that CORNEA can be rehabilitated – perhaps along the lines of Russell's own (C_5) – so as to be immune from such counterexamples. See fn.25 above.

[43]   This also indicates why James Beilby's appeal to PC when criticizing Rowe's noseeum inference will not wash – see his "William Rowe on the Evidential Value of Appearances," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 251–59.

[44]   This is not to say, however, that there are no counterexamples to $C_{4.2}$. Consider, for example, the following case brought to my attention by Graham Oppy:

Suppose that, upon entering my office, I fail to find any 'death rays,' where a death ray is a ray of light that instantaneously kills you upon coming into contact with it. Although I am entitled to infer that there are no death rays in my office, it is *not* reasonable for me to believe that, if there were death rays in the office, I would likely see them (for I would die before I could even become conscious of them).

One possible way out here is to stipulate that the phrase 'perceive x' occurring in the noseeum assumption can be substituted not only by analogous phrases such as 'find x' and 'comprehend x', but also by 'be causally affected by x.' An alternative response, suggested to me by John Schellenberg, is that the 'death ray' case cannot be a counterexample to the legitimacy of an inductive inference (as is involved in noseeum assumptions) since such a case involves only a *deductive* inference: If there were any death rays in my office, I would now be dead; I am not dead; therefore, there are no death rays in my office.

[45]   Howard-Snyder's most recent writings suggest that he has come to accept an account similar to $C_{4.2}$ as opposed to his earlier formulation in terms of C_{RA}. See his "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 299–300; "God, Evil, and Suffering," pp. 18–19; and his co-authored paper with Michael Bergmann, "Grounds for Belief in God Aside, Does Evil Make Atheism More Reasonable than Theism?" in Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 2–3. An alternative, and perhaps equally plausible, reconstruction of CORNEA is suggested by Bruce Langtry:

(C_L) If human H has background knowledge k, and H is not entitled to infer 'There is no x' from k alone, then H is entitled to infer 'There is no x' from the conjunction of k and 'I do not perceive any x' only if: the epistemic probability of 'I do not perceive any x', given both k and 'There is an x', is both low and lower than the epistemic probability of 'I do not perceive an x' given k alone.

Keeping the tradition alive, Langtry calls this principle 'PUPIL' and offers some examples in illustration of its appeal. On one example, a ship has sunk and rescue aircraft are searching for survivors in the water. Thus far no survivors have been found. Langtry points out that the degree to which one is entitled to infer that there are no survivors from one's total evidence varies with, for example, what one knows about the number of aircraft deployed, the length of time they have been searching, and so on. More precisely, it varies with the epistemic probability of *s* (where *s* is 'So far no survivors have been found') relative to the conjunction of *k* (one's background information about the shipwreck, the search, etc) and not-*p* (It is not the case that, 'There are no survivors'). These intuitions, argues Langtry, are captured well by a principle like PUPIL (see his "Eyeballing Evil," pp. 134–36).

How dark are all the ways of god to man!

<div style="text-align: right">(Euripides, *Heracles*, l.62, trans. William Arrowsmith)</div>

Defensive skepticism is an ivory tower invention of the detached epistemologist of religion that is completely out of touch with the grim realities of everyday religious faith and experience. By neutralizing the dramatic bite of evil, it makes it too easy to have religious faith, as Kierkegaard might say. The same holds, only more so, for theodicists. O Lord, save us from theodicists and defensive skeptics.

<div style="text-align: right">(Richard Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," p. 214)</div>

5. CORNEA APPLIED TO ROWE'S EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT

Given that CORNEA, at least as represented by $C_{4.2}$, appears to be a plausible epistemic principle, what bearing does this have on Rowe's evidential argument from evil? Wykstra argues that CORNEA brings to light a grave defect in Rowe's case for atheism, whereas Rowe contends that CORNEA leaves his case entirely intact. The aim of the present chapter is to clarify and assess Wykstra's CORNEA critique and Rowe's response to it, focusing in particular on Wykstra's case against Rowe's 'noseeum assumption': the assumption that, if there are God-justifying goods served by horrendous evils, we would very likely see or comprehend these goods. An examination of arguments against this assumption beyond those articulated by Wykstra will be reserved for the following chapter, while in Chapter 7 I will turn to some considerations that have been advanced by Rowe and others in support of the noseeum assumption.

1   APPLYING $C_{4.2}$ TO ROWE'S ARGUMENTS

Wykstra, it will be recalled, presents the early Rowe as accepting the factual premise of his evidential argument on the following basis:

(1) We see no good for which God would allow $E1$.
(2) (Therefore) There appears to be no good for which God allows $E1$.
(3) (Therefore) There is no good for which God allows $E1$.

Premise (3), of course, corresponds to the factual premise of the 1979 argument. According to Wykstra, the inference from (2) to (3) is an uncontroversial application of the Principle of Credulity. Wykstra's sights, therefore, are set on the inference from (1) to (2), and it is this inference that his original version of CORNEA or C_1 was intended to block.[1]

However, as we have seen, Wykstra's account of Rowe's sub-argument
for the factual premise is flawed, as is his original version of CORNEA.
Indeed, the two problems are related, for in both instances it is the use of
'appears' locutions that has led Wykstra astray. Nevertheless, by focusing
on a version of CORNEA akin to $C_{4.2}$ and applying it to the evidential argu-
ments developed by Rowe during his middle and late periods, Wykstra's
CORNEA critique takes on greater relevance and cogency.

To see this, we may begin with the middle Rowe's argument, in which
the factual premise is defended by means of the following inference:

> (P) No good state of affairs we know of is such that an omnipotent,
> omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being's
> permitting $E1$ or $E2$.

> (Q) (Therefore) No good state of affairs is such that an omnipotent,
> omniscient being's obtaining it would morally justify that being in
> permitting $E1$ or $E2$.

Applying $C_{4.2}$ to this inference, we have:

> (Ca) Person S is entitled to draw the inference from P to Q only if:
> It is reasonable for S to believe that *if not-Q, then it is likely that not-P*.

The italicized portion represents Rowe's noseeum assumption. A result sim-
ilar to (Ca) can be obtained by applying C_2 to the inference from P to Q:

> (Cb) Person S is entitled to draw the inference from P to Q only if:
> S has no reason to believe that *if not-Q, P would be (or would likely
> be) true anyway*.

Unlike (Ca), (Cb) states the condition under which the inference from P to
Q is permissible negatively, that is to say, it is stated in terms of S having no
reason to believe that Rowe's noseeum assumption is false. In fact, in "Evil
and Theodicy" Rowe suggested that Wykstra's CORNEA critique ought to
be developed along the lines of (Cb), and although this is quite a departure
from Wykstra's original formulation, this development has come to be
endorsed by Wykstra himself.[2]

Turning to Rowe's most recent formulation of the evidential argument, he
states that CORNEA comes to the following when applied to his new argument:

> (Cc) Person S is entitled to draw the inference from P to not-G only if:
> It is reasonable for S to believe that *if P is true, it is likely that not-
> G is true*.[3]

(Cc) parallels (Ca), at least if the proposition *If Q were false, then likely P
would be false too* is equivalent to the proposition *If P is true, then Q is
likely to be true*.[4] Rowe, of course, deletes Q from his new evidential argu-
ment. The inference from P to not-G, furthermore, does not appear to be a

noseeum inference, and thus it seems that CORNEA cannot be applied to Rowe's most recent argument. On Rowe's understanding, however, not-G entails Q, and so the move from P to not-G may be viewed as an implicit noseeum inference. Therefore, CORNEA, construed along the lines of $C_{4.2}$, retains its relevance to both of Rowe's arguments.

In short, what CORNEA says is that premise P justifies our believing conclusion Q (or not-G) only if it is reasonable to uphold Rowe's noseeum assumption that if P is true, then Q is likely true (or G is likely false). In other words, the inference from 'So far as we can tell, there is no greater good that would justify God in permitting $E1$ and $E2$' to 'There is no such good' (or 'There is no God') is reasonable only if it is reasonable to believe that if there were such a good (or if there were a God), we would very likely discern it. How has Rowe responded to this challenge?

2   ROWE'S RESPONSE TO CORNEA

Rowe first discusses the implications of CORNEA on his evidential argument in his 1984 paper, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis: A Reply to Wykstra." In that paper, he first outlines his argument from evil as set forth in 1979 before summarizing Wykstra's objection to it. He divides Wykstra's critique into two steps.[5] The first step is an application of CORNEA to the case of the fawn, and consists of the claim that we are entitled to believe that the fawn's suffering appears pointless only if the following proposition is true:

> (4) We have no reason to think that were God to exist, things would strike us in pretty much the same way concerning the fawn's suffering.

The second step in Wykstra's objection is the claim that (4) is false or that CORNEA is not in fact satisfied, for were God to exist it is likely that the outweighing good in relation to which God permits the fawn's suffering would be a good beyond our ken. It is this second step that Rowe challenges. Rowe, therefore, does not object to the principle of CORNEA itself, but questions Wykstra's claim that the condition specified by this principle is not met when making certain 'appears' claims in relation to instances of suffering like the fawn's.[6]

3   CORNEA AND THE BURDEN OF REASONABILITY

Wykstra, however, has objected to the way in which Rowe has presented the first step of his CORNEA critique. Rowe, as we have seen, construes this step as the claim that we are entitled to believe that the fawn's suffering

appears pointless only if (4) is true. Put differently, Rowe takes Wykstra to be claiming that we are entitled to draw the noseeum inference from P to Q only if there is no reason to think that the hypothetical *if not-Q, P anyway* is true. Rowe, however, differentiates (4) from the claim that,

(4′) We have reason to think that were God to exist, things would strike us differently concerning the fawn's suffering.

He then goes on to state that Wykstra only holds that (4), not (4′), must be true if we are entitled to claim that it appears that the fawn's suffering is gratuitous (or to claim, as the middle Rowe would put it, that Q follows from P).[7]

According to Wykstra, this is a misrepresentation of his views. CORNEA, states Wykstra, is intended to place a 'burden of reasonability' on the proponent of the evidential argument, for it allows the inference from P to Q to go through only if the proponent has reason to believe that if cases such as $E1$ and $E2$ serve some God-justifying goods then it is likely that we would discern these goods. This burden of reasonability, however, is better preserved in a version of CORNEA committed to (4′), and so it is this version that Wykstra upholds.[8]

If Wykstra is correct on this point, it is not enough for Rowe to respond to Wykstra's CORNEA critique by defending the truth of (4). That is to say, it will not do for Rowe to merely argue against any reasons offered for the view that if $E1$ and $E2$ serve a God-purposed good, things would likely strike us in pretty much the same way. Nor will it do for Rowe to simply state that "I cannot think of any special reason to think that this hypothetical [if not-Q, P anyway] is true,"[9] or that "until we are provided with some reasons for thinking that if there were an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being who created our world, then the goods in virtue of which he permits $E1$ and $E2$ would be undetectable by us, we certainly are within our rights to infer Q from P and conclude that it is likely that there is no such being."[10] For if CORNEA is best seen as placing a 'burden of reasonability' on the proponent of the evidential argument, then it is incumbent on Rowe to provide some reason for thinking that if there were a God-justifying good with respect to $E1$ and $E2$, his situation *vis-à-vis* these evils would likely be different than P asserts.

Wykstra's reading of (4) in terms of (4′) raises a number of questions. There is, for instance, the issue of whether (4′) is in fact the correct interpretation of step 1 in Wykstra's CORNEA critique. To be sure, Wykstra tells us it is, and perhaps he ought to know since he created CORNEA. Authors, however, are not immune from distorting their own work. One might wonder

why, if CORNEA was intended to place a 'burden of reasonability' on the non-theist, Wykstra would go to such lengths to provide an argument (to be outlined in Sections 5 and 6 below) for thinking that were God to exist, things would strike us in much the same way as they in fact do concerning many of the evils in the world. Should not Wykstra simply leave it to the non-theist to show that (4′) is true?

Wykstra, however, appears to be correct in placing the burden of reasonability on Rowe's shoulders. For it is Rowe who puts forward the inference from P to Q and so he must assume the responsibility of supporting or substantiating it. In the context of CORNEA, to provide support to a noseeum inference would amount to providing a reason for thinking the relevant noseeum assumption to be true. It seems, then, that Wykstra, in attempting to show that (4), and hence Rowe's noseeum assumption, is false, has overlooked the fact that the weight of presumption may be on Rowe's side.[11]

Nevertheless, the issue of where the burden ought to be placed may in the end be a moot one. To see this, suppose that while gazing at a tree in the nearby park from my office on the twentieth floor, I come to form the belief, 'So far as I can tell, there are no spiders on the tree,' and I infer from this that there are no spiders on the tree. Am I justified in drawing this inference? According to $C_{4.2}$, whether I am justified in drawing this inference turns on whether it is reasonable for me to believe that if there were any spiders I would likely see them. But does this mean that I must have some reason to believe that if there are any spiders I would likely see them? Or does it mean that I must have no reason to believe that even if there were any spiders I would not see them? I may, in fact, have no reason to believe that even if there were any spiders I would fail to notice them, if only because I have given the matter very little thought. My inference, however, would remain unwarranted. This indicates that the phrase 'no reason to believe' should in the present context be understood to imply that no reason has been found after careful deliberation. In this sense, it would be unlikely, albeit possible, for me to have no reason to believe that even if there were any spiders I would fail to notice them. Nevertheless, if my noseeum inference were to be justified I would be required to at least consider possible defeaters in the form of reasons for thinking that even if there were spiders I would not notice them. Thus, whether I put forward reasons of my own or merely consider possible defeaters, I am required to reflect on the grounds on which I draw the inference. As long as this requirement is imposed, it seems to make little difference to the epistemic status of my inference whether a further burden of reasonability is enforced.

Finally, assuming that the burden of reasonability lies with Rowe, there remains the question of whether this burden can be discharged. This, of

course, amounts to providing a plausible reason for thinking that Rowe's noseeum assumption is true, a matter to be addressed in Chapter 7.

4   ROWE ON STEP 2 OF WYKSTRA'S CORNEA CRITIQUE

Notwithstanding Wykstra's own portrayal of his CORNEA critique, it is clear that the second step of his critique is aimed at showing that (4) is false.[12] He begins with a comparison between the vision and wisdom of an omniscient being such as that postulated by theism and the cognitive capacities of members of the human species. Clearly, the gap between God's intellect and ours is immense, and Wykstra compares it to the gap between the cognitive abilities of a parent and her one-month-old infant. But if this is the case, then even if there were outweighing goods connected in the requisite way to the instances of suffering appealed to by Rowe, that we should discern most of these goods is just as likely as that a one-month-old infant should discern most of her parents' purposes for those pains they allow her to suffer – that is to say, it is not likely at all. Assuming that CORNEA is correct, Rowe would not then be entitled to claim, for any given instance of apparently pointless suffering, that it is indeed pointless. For as the above comparison between the divine intellect and the human mind indicates, even if there were outweighing goods served by certain instances of suffering, such goods are likely to be beyond our ken and so our cognized situation would be just as Rowe says it is with respect to the fawn's suffering. What Rowe has failed to see, according to Wykstra, is that "if theism is true, this is just what one would expect: for if we think carefully about the sort of being theism proposes for our belief, it is entirely expectable – given what we know of our cognitive limits – that the goods by virtue of which this Being allows known suffering should very often be beyond our ken."[13]

What exactly is Wykstra's argument here? Rowe outlines the reasoning employed by Wykstra as follows:

(5) God's mind grasps goods beyond our ken.
(6) (Therefore) It is likely that the goods in relation to which God permits many sufferings are beyond our ken.[14]
(7) (Therefore) It is likely that many of the sufferings in our world do not appear to have a point – we cannot see what goods justify God in permitting them.[15]

Rowe objects to the inference from (5) to (6). He argues that behind this inference lies the assumption that the greater goods in virtue of which God permits

most sufferings are goods that *either* come into existence far in the future *or* remain unknown to us even after they have obtained. However, this assumption is not licensed by the mere hypothesis that God exists and can comprehend goods that we are unable to think of. Rather, all that can be inferred from (5) is:

(8) If God exists then the outweighing goods in relation to which some sufferings are permitted by God are, *antecedent to their obtaining*, beyond our ken.[16]

But (8) is clearly insufficient to justify the claim made by Wykstra that even if God were to exist, the evils in our world would appear to us as they in fact do. Rowe, therefore, concludes that Wykstra's objection fails.

Howard-Snyder presents Wykstra's argument in a similar way:

(9) Were there a God, he would be omniscient.
(10) (Therefore) God would know a great deal more than we do.
(11) (Therefore) If there were a God, it is unlikely that we would see his reason for permitting most of the horrors there actually are.
(12) (Therefore) There is good reason to think that, were there a God, it is unlikely that we would see his reason for permitting $E2$.[17]

Howard-Snyder's assessment of this argument is less than flattering: "I believe that the Appeal to Omniscience is little more than a rhetorical device masquerading as an important insight. If we unpack it a bit, we'll see that it amounts to very little in the way of an argument."[18] The problem, in particular, lies with the inference from (10) to (11). The following two premises are required before the inference to (11) can go through:

(13) One of the things that God would know is that there is a sufficient reason for him to permit those horrors that are actually inscrutable to us, including $E2$.
(14) God's reason for permitting those horrors would probably fall outside the scope of what we would be able to discern.

Premise (13) is by no means obviously true, for one may agree with Dostoyevsky's Ivan Karamazov that no good is good enough for God to permit an innocent child to suffer, as in $E2$. With respect to premise (14), there does not appear to be any reason for thinking it true – at least, the mere appeal to God's omniscience and our comparative ignorance does not provide any support for (14). As Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne put it, "what is at issue is the extent of our access to a certain domain. That an omniscient being would know lots more than us in general shows nothing about whether we are ignorant of items in some particular domain."[19]

But have Rowe and Howard-Snyder accurately represented Wykstra's argument? Wykstra has not, in fact, objected to this way of presenting his argument.[20] He does, nevertheless, draw attention to the importance of the Parent Analogy in his attempt to show that if God exists, it is only to be expected that the world would be one in which God-purposed goods are beyond our ken. However, the reconstructions of Wykstra's argument offered by Rowe and Howard-Snyder overlook this appeal to the Parent Analogy. Perhaps, then, Wykstra's argument is better viewed as an *analogical argument* along the following lines:

(15) The gap between God's intellect and ours is comparable to the gap between the cognitive abilities of a parent and her one-month-old infant.

(16) (Therefore) Just as it is unlikely that a one-month-old infant would discern most of her parents' purposes for the pains they allow her to suffer, say, at the hands of a paediatrician, so too it is unlikely that we would discern most of God's reasons for permitting horrendous evil.

(17) (Therefore) It is likely that the goods in relation to which God permits many evils are beyond our ken.

(18) (Therefore) It is likely that many of the evils in our world would appear to not have a point.

Without wishing to take this interpretive matter further, I aim to assess how well these arguments fare under close investigation. I will begin with Rowe's version of Wykstra's argument before proceeding to examine Wykstra's argument as stated in the analogical mode. Given that Howard-Snyder's formulation closely resembles that put forward by Rowe, and since Rowe develops his version in greater detail, it will not be necessary to look at Howard-Snyder's formulation separately.

5   WYKSTRA'S ARGUMENT – ROWE'S VERSION

Rowe, as noted earlier, presents the second step of Wykstra's CORNEA critique as follows:

(5) God's mind grasps goods beyond our ken.

(6) (Therefore) It is likely that the goods in relation to which God permits many sufferings are beyond our ken.

(7) (Therefore) It is likely that many of the sufferings in our world do not appear to have a point – we cannot see what goods justify God in permitting them.

Rowe's objection to this argument consists in the claim that the inference from (5) to (6) is warranted only by means of an unjustified assumption.

Rowe ties this objection to his distinction between 'restricted theism' and 'expanded theism'.[21] This distinction runs as follows:

Standard theism (ST): the view that God (an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being who created the world) exists.[22]

Within ST the following two forms of theism can be identified:

Restricted standard theism (RST): the view that God exists, unaccompanied by other, independent, religious claims.

Expanded standard theism (EST): the view that God exists, conjoined with other significant religious claims (e.g., claims about sin, redemption, a future life, a last judgment).

Rowe clarifies his earlier criticism of Wykstra by pointing out that it is the mere hypothesis of RST that does not license the inference from (5) to (6). However, on the hypothesis of EST, the inference may go through. To see this, add RST with the apostle Paul's claim in Romans 8:18 that "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (cf. 2 Cor 4: 17), thus producing the following proposition:

(19) The goods for the sake of which God must permit vast amounts of human and animal suffering will be realized only at the end of the world.

The conjunction of the proposition that God exists with proposition (19) creates a version of EST. However, given this version of EST, there is good reason to think that were God to exist the evils in the world would strike us in pretty much the same way they in fact do. According to Rowe, therefore, his evidential argument only tells against RST, not EST. But this, in Rowe's opinion, is all that is required to dispose of Wykstra's critique.

A possible line of response is to hold that RST, and not just EST, is immune to Rowe's critique. Wykstra, in fact, appears to endorse this view when stating, for example, that the claim that the relevant outweighing goods are entirely outside our ken is not an additional postulate, but was implicit in theism all along.[23] Rowe, however, denies this, arguing instead that Wykstra has here confounded RST with EST, for all that is implicit in bare or restricted theism is that God's mind grasps goods that are, antecedent to their obtaining, beyond our ken (proposition (8) above).

Rowe's response to Wykstra's CORNEA critique raises a number of issues, three of which will be considered here. First, I wish to briefly examine (in Section 5.1) the distinction between RST and EST. Second, I will assess (in Sections 5.2 and 5.3) Rowe's response to Wykstra's critique in the light of the RST–EST distinction. Third, I will take up the issue (in Section 5.4) of the legitimacy of Rowe's assumption that it is only RST, not EST, that he needs to contend with.

5.1   The RST–EST Distinction

There is, clearly, a distinction to be drawn between mere theistic belief and more elaborate forms of theism such as orthodox Christianity, as the latter but not the former is committed to such doctrines as the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Atonement, and heaven and hell. Another form of expanded theism is 'deism,' according to which there is a divine creator of the world but no divine revelation. The deist, unlike the orthodox Christian, denies that God reveals to us truths that are important for us to believe but which human reason cannot discover on its own.[24]

One may argue, however, that at least some forms of EST are implied by RST. For example, RST posits a perfectly good creator of the world. But any such being, insofar as it is personal and loving, would want all rational creatures to enjoy an eternal life of communion with itself and so would not condemn all of them to annihilation upon their bodily death. The notion of a future heavenly life, then, appears to be implicit in RST. Perhaps an argument along similar lines can be given to show that a proposition such as (19) also follows from RST.

The fact, however, that some forms of EST are implied by RST can easily lead to a misunderstanding of Rowe's RST–EST distinction. For suppose that certain claims, such as proposition (19), are implied by RST and that a version of theism constructed along these lines has the resources to answer the evidential problem of evil. It is tempting to then suppose that the evidential problem can be resolved without going beyond the confines of RST. But this would be to overlook Rowe's view that RST is restricted in the sense that it does not include any claim that is not *entailed* by it.[25] The notions of entailment and implication are undoubtedly difficult and multifaceted, but the notion of entailment being appealed to by Rowe is clearly a much stronger relation than that of implication. Usually, to say of a statement p that it implies another statement q is to say either that it is not the case that p is true and q is false (in which case p is said to 'materially imply' q), or that p evidentially supports or probabilifies q. But the kind of relation employed by Rowe is closer to 'strict implication' (where p implies q only if it is logically impossible for p to be true and q false) or perhaps 'logical entailment' (p entails q only if q can be logically deduced from p). Given that a proposition like (19) does not follow by means of strict implication or logical entailment from RST, any version of theism that includes (19) is necessarily a version of EST. One cannot therefore hope to answer the evidential problem of evil on the basis of RST alone and, at the same time, appeal to something like (19) in one's answer.

5.2   The Inference from (5) to (6) Re-examined

Even assuming that a proposition like (19) is somehow 'contained' within RST, does (19) in conjunction with (5) allow us to infer (6)? That is to say, if we accept that God's mind grasps goods beyond our ken, and that the goods for the sake of which God permits suffering will be realized in the future, does it follow that the goods in relation to which God permits suffering are beyond our ken?

In line with what has been said earlier, (19) is to be read as the claim that the generic future good for the sake of which suffering is permitted is the enjoyment of eternal felicity with God. In that case, this future good is not beyond our ken, at least not entirely beyond our ken, as we have a rudimentary grasp of what this good consists in. But then one cannot draw the inference, in the manner of (5)–(6), that the goods in relation to which God permits suffering are beyond our ken.

This reveals a slight defect in Rowe's treatment of the inference from (5) to (6). Rowe believes that this inference can be made only if the following assumption is allowed:

(20)   The greater goods in virtue of which God permits many sufferings are goods that *either* come into existence far in the future *or* remain unknown to us even after they have obtained.

But the mere fact that a particular good G comes into existence in the distant future by no means entails that G is beyond our ken. For as Rowe himself acknowledges, if we take the future good for the sake of which God permits many evils to be the experience of the beatific vision in the hereafter, then such a good is clearly within our ken to some degree.[26] Perhaps what Rowe should have said is that the assumption behind the inference from (5) to (6) is:

(19)   The greater goods in virtue of which God permits many sufferings are goods that *either* come into existence far in the future **but are unknown to us antecedent to their obtaining** *or* remain unknown to us even after they have obtained.

It seems that only an assumption of this sort would warrant the move from (5) to (6). (21), however, is not entailed by RST or even by RST expanded along the lines suggested by (19).

A similar weakness affects Wykstra's criticism of what he labels 'Rowe's Futurity Assumption.'[27] According to Wykstra, Rowe holds that to be able to make the inference from (5) to (6) it must be assumed that the goods for which God allows many known evils are goods that come into

existence in an unknown distant future – Wykstra calls this the Futurity Assumption. Rowe is then said to claim that the mere assumption of RST or (in Wykstra's terminology) Core Theism gives us no reason to think that the Futurity Assumption is true.

It may be pointed out that Wykstra has slightly misrepresented Rowe here. For according to Rowe, the assumption that needs to be made in order to allow the inference from (5) to (6) is that the greater goods in virtue of which God permits many sufferings are goods that *either* come into existence far in the future *or* remain unknown to us even after they have obtained. What Wykstra calls the Futurity Assumption is, according to Rowe, only one of two possible assumptions available to the theist who wishes to infer (6) from (5).

In any case, Wykstra argues that Core Theism does provide us with good reason for thinking that God-purposed goods for sufferings would often lie in the distant future and thus be beyond our ken.[28] He defers to a variant of his original Parent Analogy to support his case. The merits of this analogy will be examined later (in Section 6.4), but even assuming that the analogy is successful, this would not rescue the inference from (5) to (6). For as was pointed out earlier, that a God-justifying good for a particular evil lies in the distant future does not imply that this good is beyond our ken. There is no direct correlation between the temporal location of goods and our cognizance of them. Therefore, the Futurity Assumption, even if it were granted, would be insufficient to validate the inference from (5) to (6).

5.3   The Prospects for EST

Rowe points out that, as a last resort, the theist may attempt to justify the inference from (5) to (6) by simply doing "a little expanding" so that "the evidence will no longer render his cherished belief unlikely."[29] However, this strategy, argues Rowe, is not a tenable course of action. For assume that evidence *e* disconfirms a hypothesis *h* by making *h* more unlikely than it would otherwise be. In response to this situation, we may wish to conjoin *h* with a proposition that clearly entails *e* or makes *e* likely (call this conjunction *h'*), thus giving us our desired outcome of *e* not disconfirming *h'*. The cost of this strategy, however, is that *h'* will then be of itself just as unlikely as *h* was, given *e*. Rowe, therefore, concludes that "if the facts about suffering do render RST unlikely, there is not much to be gained by retreating to EST."[30] In a similar vein, Michael Peterson writes that "in so far as the problem of evil purports to strike at restricted theism, it strikes at any form of expanded theism."[31]

But what exactly is Rowe's objection here? Perhaps his point is that the theist's strategy of doing "a little expanding" so as to dissolve the problem of evil is entirely *ad hoc*. It would be analogous to protecting the hypothesis of

old-earth creationism from the fossil data by simply making the requisite addition to the basic creationist claim (e.g., the world was created by God with the fossils already in place). Although the fossil evidence would not lower the probability of this expanded version of creationism, this version, in virtue of the way in which its content has been expanded, would make itself less probable than it was. Something along these lines is suggested by Rowe when stating in connection with the theist's proposed way out that "the danger here is that one may purchase immunity at the price of enlarging the original hypothesis, thus increasing (decreasing) its original implausibility (plausibility)."[32] There would, of course, be no such objection if one upheld the relevant variety of EST on the basis of some evidence and then brought EST to bear on the problem of evil. But that is not what is being contemplated here.

However, Rowe seems to have an additional objection to the retreat to EST, which can be gleaned from the following revealing footnote in "The Empirical Argument from Evil":

> Since EST entails RST, EST is just as improbable, given E [the facts about evil alluded to by Rowe, in particular, the occurrence of inscrutable horrendous evil in the world], as is RST. The reason this can be so, even though EST's probability is not lowered by E, is that the probability of EST, given E, is a function not only of any tendency of E to disconfirm it, but also of the prior probability of EST, the probability of EST alone. Thus, even though E does not disconfirm EST, since EST commits us to much more than does RST, the probability of EST alone may be *much lower* than the probability of RST alone. In fact, given that EST accounts for E and entails RST, its prior probability *must be* much lower than RST's, *if* the probability of RST on E is a good deal lower than the probability of RST alone.[33]

Rowe makes three principal assertions here:

(22) EST's probability need not be lowered by E.
(23) The probability of EST alone is lower than the probability of RST alone.
(24) The probability of EST on E is just as low as the probability of RST on E.

The point behind (22) is clear. For it is safe to assume that some forms of EST would have adequate resources to deal with the problem of evil. Consider, for example, a form of EST which, in accord with certain mystical traditions, emphasizes the mystery or incomprehensibility of God to such an extent that God's specific intentions are taken to be utterly unknowable by us. The proponent of this version of EST may claim to know that

God is perfectly good (perhaps on the basis of some sacred text), but in addition claims (in line with her mystical tradition) that for any event that takes place in our world, God's reasons for allowing that event to occur will always be hidden from us in this life. In that case, God's reasons for permitting suffering would obviously be beyond our ken. This version of EST, therefore, would have no difficulty accounting for inscrutable evils, even though such evils may have a deleterious effect on RST.

   Although EST is not rendered unlikely by the facts about suffering, Rowe contends in (23) and (24) that the probability of EST alone is lower than the probability of RST alone and that the probability of EST on E is just as low as the probability of RST on E. But what are Rowe's reasons for accepting (23) and (24)? In the above passage, Rowe can be understood to be arguing as follows:

   (25) If A entails B, then $\Pr(A/C) \leq \Pr(B/C)$.
   (26) EST entails RST.
   (27) (Therefore) $\Pr(\text{EST}/k) < \Pr(\text{RST}/k)$. [from 29 & 30]
   (28) (Therefore) $\Pr(\text{EST}/k \;\&\; E) \leq \Pr(\text{RST}/k \;\&\; E)$. [from 29 & 30]

Conclusions (27) and (28) correspond to propositions (23) and (24) respectively. The key premise in this argument – viz., (25) – is a principle derivable from the axioms of the probability calculus.[34] Given the intuitive plausibility of this principle, Rowe's conclusions appear quite uncontroversial.

   James Beilby, however, insists that something is amiss in Rowe's reasoning. He writes that, "Since nothing can be added to RST which would increase its probability on E, Rowe has in this way neatly made his *EAE* [evidential argument from evil] impregnable to the theist's objections."[35] Beilby goes on to locate the source of the problem in Rowe's failure to properly grasp the nature of the evidence employed by the theist to block the noseeum inference. This evidence, according to Beilby, is encapsulated by what Alston has called the 'agnostic thesis' (or AT, for short), which states that, given our limited cognitive capabilities, we cannot justifiably judge that a particular instance of evil is such that God would not forego a greater good by preventing it.[36] Beilby's argument turns on the distinction, introduced by John Pollock, between *rebutting defeaters* and *undercutting defeaters*.[37] The paradigm case for a rebutting defeater is one in which evidence is found supporting a certain proposition, but evidence is later discovered for its denial. For example, if we know of many A's and they are all B, that can justify us in concluding that all A's are B's. However, if we subsequently encounter an *A* that is not B, we have a rebutting defeater of our conclusion that all *A*'s are B's. On the other hand, we may find evidence not against the conclusion

itself, but against the reason we have for upholding that conclusion – in that case, we would possess an undercutting defeater. According to Beilby, Rowe incorrectly construes the theist's evidence (like AT) as a rebutting defeater of the noseeum inference and thus as independent evidence or an additional postulate to RST. AT, however, is best understood as an undercutting defeater, for it is a second-order belief regarding our ability to make a well-grounded determination that there are gratuitous evils, and thus it is intended to undermine the grounds on which Rowe's noseeum inference is made.[38] AT, therefore, expands or qualifies E rather than RST, and so the theist's view of the relationship between RST and E is not to be expressed as:

(29) Pr [(RST & AT)/E] > 0.5,

but as:

(30) Pr [RST/(E & AT)] > 0.5.

That is to say, Rowe is mistaken in thinking that the theist holds that RST and AT are not improbable on E. Rather, what the theist holds is that RST is not improbable on E and AT.[39]

Beilby correctly construes Wykstra's CORNEA critique of Rowe's noseeum inference as an undercutting strategy. It is difficult to see, however, why this should lead us to think that Wykstra is committed to (30) rather than (29). Indeed, it seems more natural to view AT as an addition to RST, thus forming what has come to be known as 'sceptical theism'. But even if Beilby's portrayal of the theist's position is correct, it leaves open the crucial question as to whether a sufficiently strong case on behalf of AT can be developed (this, of course, is the primary concern of the present and following chapters).

Perhaps a more serious difficulty rests with Rowe's claim that the prior probability of EST *must be much lower* than RST's. This does not follow from the axiom expressed by (25) in conjunction with (26). All that follows from (25) and (26) is that the prior probability of EST is *no higher* than that of RST. There is, therefore, a missing premise in the argument for (23). Rowe, in the final sentence of the above quoted passage, suggests that the missing premise is the following:

(31) Pr (RST/k & E) < Pr (RST/k).

That is to say, RST is less probable given the evidence of evil than it is prior to such considerations. Let's assume, for example, that Pr (RST/k) = 0.5, whereas Pr (RST/k & E) = 0.333. Given (31), in addition to (25) and (26), it follows that Pr (EST/k & E) can be no higher than 0.333. But since EST is not made any less probable by E, it also follows that Pr (EST/k) = 0.333.

It can then be concluded that the prior probability of EST (0.333) must be much lower than that of RST (0.5).

Robert Adams, however, has contested this argument for (23).[40] He points out that two possible judgments lie before us: (a) the judgment as to how much less probable RST is, given E, than it is apart from E; and (b) the judgment as to how much less probable EST is than RST. According to Adams, Rowe begins with a judgment of type (a) before arriving at a judgment of type (b), and as admitted by Rowe himself, Adams' perception here is "exactly right."[41] The problem with this strategy, argues Adams, is that it can be reversed in favour of the theist as follows:

> We may begin with the view that EST accounts for E and that the probability of EST given E is not much less than the probability of RST given E. In line with this view, assume that both (EST/k & E) and (RST/k & E) enjoy a probability of 0.8. In that case, the prior probability of EST – that is, Pr (EST/k) – cannot be less than 0.8. And, of course, the same can be said about the prior probability of RST. It may therefore be concluded, contra (23), that the probability of EST alone need not be less than the probability of RST alone.

However, a type (b) approach of this sort not only shows that (23) is false, but also undermines Rowe's case for (24). A proponent of Adams' strategy would have little reason to believe that the probability of EST on E is equal to the probability of RST on E, or at least would not be worried if it were (for both EST/E and RST/E may have a probability as high as 0.8). Rowe concedes that Adams' strategy is a legitimate one, but notes that to pursue this strategy effectively one must

> *argue* that E does not significantly disconfirm RST by showing that there are not implausible hypotheses that, when added to RST, produce a result that both accounts for E and is not significantly less probable than is RST itself. To pursue this last way would be to endeavor to give some not implausible suggestions concerning O's [the theistic God's] reasons for permitting E. Whether the theist can succeed in this task remains to be seen.[42]

The challenge, then, for the theist is to put forward a version of EST that is not significantly less probable than RST *and* accounts for E. The options here are many and varied. One promising candidate, as noted earlier, is the expansion of RST along the lines of AT. Alternatively, one may follow James Sennett in thinking that RST plus the traditional Christian doctrine of the Fall would do the trick.[43] The prospects for AT are considered further in Section 6 below as well as in Chapters 6–8, while some theodicies on offer are examined in

Chapters 10–11. In the meantime, however, it may be concluded that Adams has drawn attention to a potential weakness in Rowe's case for (23) and (24).

5.3.1   Appendix to 'The Prospects for EST'.   In other areas of his work Rowe has suggested a quite different approach to the case against the retreat to EST. In a recent paper, for example, Rowe writes that,

> The importance of not taking theism to include the claims held by only one particular religion among the three major theistic religions of the West is that the inclusion would make theism less likely; for if we identify theism with a particular one among the great theistic religions, then the truth of theism itself is made to depend on all the essential beliefs of that particular theistic religion.[44]

Similarly, in the earlier quote from footnote 16 of "The Empirical Argument from Evil," Rowe states that "since EST commits us to much more than does RST, the probability of EST alone may be *much lower* than the probability of RST alone." Rowe seems in these passages to be arguing thus:

> The prior probability of a theory is (at least partly) a function of its simplicity, where a theory is simple insofar as its ontological commitments are as minimal as possible. Thus, the prior probability of EST is much lower than that of RST since the former "commits us to much more" than does the latter. Therefore, any explanatory power (or other theoretical benefits) EST may have is offset by its 'top-heaviness', and thus a retreat to EST may not be the best option for the theist to take.

There are, however, serious problems with the assumption that prior probability is proportional to simplicity and inversely proportional to complexity. For one thing, there is the problem of providing a sufficiently clear explication of the concept of simplicity so that it may be useful as an evaluative criterion. For instance, Rowe talks of RST committing us to much less than EST. But how is this notion of 'commitment' to be understood? Does simplicity amount to paucity of commitment to beliefs, or propositions, or laws, or predicates, or individuals?[45] Rowe appears to be referring to commitment to a set of beliefs, thus leading to the problem that any set of beliefs can be reduced to one member by conjunction.[46] Equally troublesome is the presumed link between simplicity and truth. What grounds are there for thinking that a complex theory is less likely to be true than a simpler one? What reason is there to think that reality is fundamentally simple? Rowe, following in the footsteps of Swinburne, appears to take the *a priori* or intrinsic probability of theism to be a function of its simplicity.[47] But as Plantinga has

responded to this penchant for the economical in the work of Mackie,

> Why should we suppose that reality prefers economy? Desert land-
> scapes and the Sonoran wilderness are indeed attractive; but so are lux-
> uriant tropical gardens and the Olympic Peninsula. Mackie seems to
> think it is *a priori* likely that there are fewer things than more. Others
> disagree; indeed, many have thought it likely that there be as many
> things as there can be, a view which receives a bizarre sort of support
> from recent developments in contemporary physics. But is there really
> any reason to suppose that either of these views is correct?[48]

This is not to deny that scientists often defer to simplicity when determin-
ing which of several competing hypotheses is most plausible. However, even
in science simple theoretical systems are sometimes superseded by relatively
complex ones (this, as indicated by Plantinga, appears to have occurred with
the replacement of classical Newtonian mechanics by contemporary quantum
theory). One may object that such discoveries of complexity do not under-
mine principles of simplicity. For such principles, properly understood, allow
for criteria such as explanatory power and fit with background knowledge to
take precedence over simplicity. Appeals to simplicity, therefore, do not
involve any commitment to the thesis that reality is simple. Nevertheless, the
advocate of simplicity remains committed to the view that otherwise equiva-
lent rival hypotheses can and should be evaluated in terms of relative simplic-
ity. But what could justify this preference for simpler theories other than some
substantive assumption about the nature of reality?[49]

Considerations such as these have led many philosophers of science to
view simplicity not as an evaluative criterion, but as a pragmatic tool facilitating
(among other things) comprehension, computation, experimentation and
refutation, but in no way indicating greater verisimilitude.[50] Simplicity, in
short, is no guide to truth. To be sure, many difficulties lurk here, not the
least of which is the problem of whether criteria other than simplicity would
suffice to constrain us from multiplying entities beyond necessity.[51]
Although I cannot proceed further with this matter, the foregoing may suf-
fice to cast some doubt on that version of Rowe's case against EST that is
derived from the notion of simplicity.[52]

5.4   Rowe's Restriction to RST

According to Rowe, to defeat his argument from evil by appealing to
CORNEA, one must provide a good reason for thinking that *if RST were true*
then things would likely strike us in pretty much the same way concerning,
say, the fawn's suffering. However, if Rowe is incorrect in thinking of the
appeal to EST as being *ad hoc* or in some other way illegitimate, then there

seems to be no reason for restricting the terms of the discussion to RST alone. Moreover, there may be good reasons to take EST into consideration when assessing Wykstra's CORNEA critique. For as Keith Chrzan has pointed out, the key question is not whether horrendous evils tell against some bare or limited form of theism, but whether they count against the fully fledged forms of theism normally upheld by, for example, Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Rowe, by limiting himself to RST, fails to address this question and so leaves the traditional theist unperturbed. In Chrzan's words:

> Rowe overestimates his success, however, for most theists will be content to admit that the multiplicity of evil that permeates our world does not disconfirm the expanded version of theism they hold dear; that a sterile, stripped-down rendition of theism is so disconfirmed just does not count for much.[53]

F.J. Fitzpatrick made a similar point soon after the publication of Rowe's seminal 1979 paper. In reference to the view that human understanding of the divine nature is profoundly inadequate, he wrote that

> It is important to realise that this *is* the view to which traditional theism is committed, and hence that it would be a question-begging procedure to challenge the tenability of Christian belief on the ground of the presence of evil in the world if this challenge presupposed that God's nature and purposes can be comprehended fairly adequately by the human mind; and this presupposition has, it seems, been made by a good number of recent writers on the problem of evil.[54]

Fitzpatrick may be understood to be saying that the problem of evil is normally approached by the theistic (or at least the Christian) community from the perspective of EST as exemplified by RST added to AT. Therefore, to engage traditional theists the atheologian must not overlook the perspective they are working within, but must address it and attempt to show that there is something unsatisfactory about it.

By way of response, it may be argued that if the facts of evil render RST unlikely, this result would also be troubling for many expanded theists. For suppose that it can be shown that bare theism lacks the resources to justify or explain horrendous evil. That need not count against all expanded forms of theism, but it may be an important first step in an overall plan aimed against the more traditional forms of expanded theism (viz., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). This would be the case if, for example, it were unlikely that most plausible theodicies open to full-blooded forms of theism were not available to bare theists. Indeed, a quick survey of the major theodicies currently on offer (e.g., free will and soul-making theodicies) lends some support to this view, for these theodicies do not usually presuppose a

commitment to one of the major theistic religions, but are often developed from the perspective of bare theism alone.

Although there may be some truth in this line of thought, it is guilty of confusing implication and entailment. As was pointed out earlier (in Section 5.1 above), RST does not include theories or propositions not entailed by it. It follows that at least some of the theodicies that are usually offered by theistic philosophers would not be available to the restricted theist. John Hick's soul-making theodicy, for example, may be implied by, but is clearly not entailed by, RST. Marilyn Adams' theodicy, in which horrendous evils are defeated by the incommensurable good of 'face-to-face' intimacy with God, is also unavailable to the bare theist. And so even if Rowe can successfully carry out his project of showing that restricted theism is rendered unlikely by certain kinds of evil, that need not be problematic for many expanded theists.

It seems, then, that Chrzan's criticisms are not without merit. To address this difficulty, it is perhaps advisable to take at least some forms of EST into account when evaluating Rowe's evidential argument. This strategy would allow us to consider a greater range of theodicies in relation to horrendous evil than if we restricted ourselves to RST. Allowing EST into the picture also compels us to enquire whether there are any plausible versions of EST which make it likely that the goods for the sake of which God permits many evils would be beyond our ken. The most promising candidate in this regard may be EST as represented by the conjunction of RST and AT. The approach taken in the present work is to assess the merits of this form of EST by examining arguments marshalled for and against Rowe's noseeum assumption. To be sure, allowing EST into the picture means that the task of defending Rowe's evidential argument increases in magnitude and difficulty, but it also means that the rewards to be reaped substantially increase if the defence succeeds.[55]

6   WYKSTRA'S ARGUMENT – THE ANALOGICAL VERSION

If the second step of Wykstra's CORNEA critique, as it is represented by Rowe, is doomed to failure, perhaps the prospects for this critique will be improved if it is set forth as an analogical argument in the following manner:

(15)   The gap between God's intellect and ours is comparable to the gap between the cognitive abilities of a parent and her one-month-old infant.

(16)   (Therefore) Just as it is unlikely that a one-month-old infant would discern most of her parents' purposes for the pains they allow her

to suffer, say, at the hands of a paediatrician, so too it is unlikely that we would discern most of God's reasons for permitting horrendous evil.

(17) (Therefore) It is likely that the goods in relation to which God permits many evils are beyond our ken.

(18) (Therefore) It is likely that many of the evils in our world would appear to not have a point.

6.1 Analogical Reasoning

How successful is this version of Wykstra's argument? To answer this question it may be helpful to briefly look at the logic of analogical reasoning.[56] Analogical arguments are a widely used form of inductive reasoning in which a comparison is drawn between two or more distinct objects. An argument of this sort begins by stating that one object is known to have a certain characteristic, but it is not known whether another object has this characteristic. It is then pointed out that both objects are alike in one or more respects, and from this it is inferred that they are alike in at least one further respect inasmuch as the second object has the additional property which the first object is already known to possess. An analogical argument, then, may be represented as having the following form:

(32) Object x has property F.
(33) Object x and object y have a set of properties G in common.
(34) (Therefore) It is likely that object y has property F.

Analogical arguments may be strong or weak. When determining the strength of an analogy, a number of factors come into play. For example, one may look at the number of respects in which the objects involved are said to be analogous as well as disanalogous. This approach, however, is fraught with difficulties – for example, a large number of similarities between two children does not justify the conclusion that one child is named 'Daniel' just because the other one is.[57] Clearly, a more important condition than property counting and mapping underlies valid analogical inferences. This condition, according to the general consensus, must be stated in terms of *relevance*. Thus, the crucial question when appraising an argument from analogy is whether the objects that are being compared are similar in ways that are relevant to the argument. To the extent that there are relevant similarities, the probability that the conclusion is true is increased; to the extent that there are relevant dissimilarities, the probability of the conclusion's being true is reduced. This may be highlighted by comparing a strong

analogical inference with a much weaker one:

(A) (1) Jones' car uses 10 litres of fuel to travel a distance of 100 km.
    (2) Jones' car is similar to Smith's in that both are new cars, with the same kind of engine, transmission, and body weight.
    (3) (Therefore) It is likely that Smith's car uses 10 litres of fuel to travel a distance of 100 km.

(B) (1) Jones' car uses 10 litres of fuel to travel a distance of 100 km.
    (2) Jones's car is similar to Smith's in that both have the same colour, headlamps, dashboard, and interior fittings.
    (3) (Therefore) It is likely that Smith's car uses 10 litres of fuel to travel a distance of 100 km.

Argument (A) is a cogent analogical argument, whereas (B) is incredibly feeble, and this is because the second premise in (A), unlike its counterpart in (B), manages to identify relevant similarities between the two cars.

But how are we to understand this notion of relevance? Irving Copi makes the following suggestion:

> One property or circumstance is relevant to another, for purposes of analogical argument, if the first affects the second, that is, if it has a *causal* or determining effect on that other.[58]

Relevance, then, is to be explicated in terms of causality. A successful analogical argument is thus one in which a common set of properties G – that is, the set of properties shared by objects x and y – is causally connected to the inferred property F – that is, the property that is attributed to y on the basis that x is F, and x and y are G. In the above examples, there is a well-established causal connection between fuel consumption and such factors as engine design and transmission type, whereas no causal correlation can be found between fuel efficiency and, say, interior design. This is why (A) is a much stronger argument than (B). Assuming that causal connections are to be taken as law-like regularities, we may put forward the following as a necessary condition that must be satisfied by any cogent analogical argument:

(AN) An argument of the form, 'Object x is F; x and y have G in common; therefore, x and y also have y in common', is a cogent argument only if G is causally connected to F in such a way that the following statement is true: $\forall y [\Pr (y$ is F/y is $G)$ is high].

Clearly, more needs to be said to further support and refine this criterion.[59] Nevertheless, what has been pointed out thus far may suffice for employing such a rule when detecting relevant differences or determining appropriate

degrees of similarity between the groups that are being compared in Wykstra's analogical argument.

In Wykstra's argument, the common property that is said to hold between two groups is the gap between, on the one hand, God's intellectual capacities and ours, and on the other hand, a parent's intellectual capacities and those of her one-month-old infant. It is then argued that, given this common feature, if it is unlikely that an infant would discern most of her parents' purposes for the pains they allow her to suffer, then it is also unlikely that we would discern most of God's reasons for permitting intense suffering.

To judge the adequacy of this analogy we need, in line with what was said earlier, to examine the relationship between the two key properties that figure in the analogy. These properties may be specified as follows: First, to say of a given person S_1 that they possess property C is to say that S_1 *has cognitive abilities that are immensely poorer than those of person S_2 whose role is to provide S_1 with some measure of providential care.* Second, to say of S_1 that they possess property D is to say that S_1 *is unable to understand the reasons why S_2 allows S_1 to undergo suffering on certain occasions.*

Is condition AN satisfied in this case? In other words, is there a causal connection between C and D such that, in all likelihood, if S_1 has C then S_1 also has D? To answer this question I propose to look at Rowe's criticisms of Wykstra's analogy.

6.2   Rowe's Critique of Wykstra's Parent Analogy

Rowe attempts to identify a relevant disanalogy between the one-month-old infant and our predicament as adult human beings. The infant has yet to develop the concepts required for even considering the proposition that her parents have good reasons for allowing her to suffer. This is why the infant lacks any intellectual grasp of her parents' purposes. By contrast, we (as adults) do possess the intellectual equipment necessary to evaluate the claim that there are goods that justify God in permitting human and animal suffering. And so there does not seem to be any reason why we, unlike the infant, would have no knowledge of the goods for the sake of which God allows suffering.[60]

Put differently, Rowe's point seems to be that whether property C is causally connected to D is dependent on whether the former property is conjoined with a further property such as *having the ability to evaluate the claim that there are goods that justify S_2 in permitting S_1 to suffer* – call this property E. If C is ascribed to an infant, then D can also to be ascribed to the infant, but only because the infant lacks property E. Thus C is insufficient for D to obtain; a further property is required, for example, ~E. That is why in our case as mature adults, even though we possess C we cannot, on this basis alone, be

said to also possess *D*. Condition AN is thus not met in the case of mature adults. Howard-Snyder makes a similar criticism of Wykstra's analogy:

> Our cognitive poverty doesn't preclude our knowing a great many things. What we need, then, is some good reason to think that we are like infants *in this respect*. We need some reason to believe that, like infants, there's a good chance that we are shooting in the dark when it comes to inferring pointlessness. Wykstra gives us no hints.[61]

Had we lacked *E* we would have been similar to infants 'in the relevant respect,' so that our cognitive poverty would also preclude us knowing a great many things about the intentions of our 'creator.'

Could this objection to the Parent Analogy be met by merely altering the age of the child? In line with Wykstra's invitation to his readers to adjust the child's age "to fit your own estimate of how close our knowledge is to omniscience,"[62] James Sennett has defended the parent/child analogy in terms of his relationship with his ten-year-old daughter. Sennett contends that the disparity between his daughter's moral perspective and his own "causes conflict and consternation between us at times, and may even drive her to the conclusion that some of my decisions and actions, which bring what she discerns as evil into her life, cannot possibly serve any good purpose."[63] He goes on to argue that "since such a disparity defeats the assumption that the goods she knows of are a relevant inductive sample of the goods I know of, it also defeats the assumption that the goods I know of are a relevant inductive sample of the goods God knows of (i.e., of the goods there are)."[64] Sennett is, I think, only partly correct. Given that his daughter's cognitive abilities are inferior to his own, there will obviously be occasions when she would fail to understand his reasons for allowing her to undergo suffering.[65] Nevertheless, it can be presumed that she would generally be able to grasp his intentions at least to some extent. If a ten-year-old continuously thought of the decisions or actions of her father as not doing her any good at all, we may well begin to question the relationship itself. But if we allow even a degree of understanding on the child's behalf, then the proponent of the Parent Analogy cannot draw the conclusion that we lack any understanding whatsoever of God's intentions for allowing horrendous evils.

I submit that considerations such as these establish that Wykstra's analogy fails.

6.3 Wykstra's Revised Parent Analogy

Since he introduced the Parent Analogy in 1984, Wykstra has developed it further in at least two respects. First, in his 1988 co-authored article

with Bruce Russell, Wykstra attempts to strengthen the analogy by drawing a further analogy, this time between morality and science.[66] Wykstra begins by outlining Francis Bacon's view that by the mere application of the experimental method of physics we could, in a very short period of time, get to the bottom of what causes what. This represents a view of the universe as being 'physically shallow' – that is, as having "bottom-line physical causes that are, relative to our cognitive abilities, quite near the observable surface."[67] However, the history of science since Newton has falsified this view. Science has unearthed a swarm of quarks, leptons, and other denizens of the microtheoretic deep, thus showing that the 'bottom-line' causes of the observable world lie very deep. In short, the world exhibits 'physical depth.'

Wykstra contends that just as the world is physically deep, it is also morally deep. By this he means that if the universe is the creation of a being with the sort of wisdom and vision entailed by theism, it is likely that the moral causes of God's permission of evil would be 'deep' moral goods. Thus the Parent Analogy, once it takes into account the disparity between our cognitive condition and the wisdom and vision required to create a universe, affords us reason to think that if there were God-purposed goods, they would often be beyond our ken.

The Parent Analogy received a second revision by Wykstra in 1996.[68] Wykstra at this stage focused on the question of whether the sufferings of a child serve some outweighing good that lies in the distant future. The answer, he argues, will be dependent on the following factors: the parents' intelligence, character, and ability.

First, with regard to *intelligence*, the greater the parents' intelligence with respect to their grasp of goods realizable in the future, the more likely it becomes that in some of their actions toward the child, such goods are served by events in the child's life. Second, with regard to *character*, if the parents possess a benevolent caring attitude toward their child's future, it is likely that in many of their present arrangements for the child their rationale lies in the distant future. Third, with regard to *ability*, if the parents have the means at their disposal to intentionally shape events in the considerable future, the likelihood is increased that in some of their present arrangements future goods play a determinative role.

By analogy, if the universe is the result of blind atomic processes which have no grasp of the future, which are indifferent to both remote and immediate goods or evils, and which have no power to act intentionally, then it is highly unlikely that many sufferings will serve any outweighing goods at all, and even more unlikely that such goods (if they do obtain) would lie in the distant future. On the other hand, the more likely it is that nature has a

creator and governor not lacking in intelligence, benevolence and ability, the more likely it is that future goods have a bearing on present sufferings.

In short, the greater the degree of the parents' intelligence, ability, and care for the future of the child, the more likely it is that the goods for which they permit their child's suffering will be realized in the distant future. Similarly, since God possesses unlimited intelligence and power, and cares infinitely about the life of each of his creatures, the goods that justify him in permitting suffering are likely to be realized in the distant future and thus be presently beyond our ken.

6.4   Rowe's Critique of the New Parent Analogy

We may begin by looking at the merits of Wykstra's development of the analogy in terms of the distinction between a morally deep world and a morally shallow one. Rowe has objected that no reason has been given for thinking that a deep world would be preferable to a shallow one and that, furthermore, framing the debate in such terms only serves to obfuscate the issues. Indeed, one would think that a morally shallow or transparent world would be better, given that much grief and suffering in our world is occasioned by our inability to find any good that justifies an omnipotent, omniscient being in permitting evils such as $E1$ and $E2$.[69]

Wykstra responds by questioning Rowe's 'voluntaristic' assumption that God had a choice about $E1$ and $E2$: he could have produced a world in which the goods for which he permits these evils are within our ken, or he could have created a world in which they are beyond our ken. Wykstra, however, is not so sure that this is a matter of divine choice, as opposed to being a necessary outcome of God's nature. He prefers to leave the question open, but goes on to argue that even if God does choose in a general way between creating a deep or shallow universe, it does not follow that he has a choice between allowing a particular evil for deep or shallow goods. For it may be the case, writes Wykstra, that "certain evils are such that God would allow them only in universes containing goods that are (relative to human cognitive faculties) deep goods; God would then never face the alternatives that Rowe portrays God as choosing between."[70]

Wykstra, however, appears to have missed the force of Rowe's objection, according to which the 'deep universe theory' is of little help to the original Parent Analogy. The aim of the Parent Analogy is to draw a conclusion about our knowledge of certain God-purposed goods from the fact that our cognitive abilities are vastly poorer than those of an omniscient being. That the omniscient being in question is also regarded by theists as the creator of the world does not appear to strengthen the analogy in any way, except perhaps by highlighting the vision or wisdom that would be

required by any such creator. But this is not adding anything substantially new to the original analogy. As Rowe suggests, to emphasize the vision required by a creator of the universe is not to provide a reason (or, at least, no further reason than that suggested by the original Parent Analogy) for thinking that the created universe would most likely be morally deep. This development of the Parent Analogy is therefore subject to the same problems as the original analogy.

Another possible difficulty with the 'deep universe theory' may lie with the further analogy drawn by Wykstra between science and morality. Richard Gale finds this analogy quite dubious given that in the world of morality, unlike that of science, the basic principles and rules are not hidden, but are completely on the surface, patently obvious to the gaze of all participants. In Gale's words, "a hidden morality is no morality."[71] But does this not run counter to the fact of widespread disagreement in the realm of ethics? Does it not also fail to account for the progress made by our increased sensitivity in a number of areas (e.g., the environment, gender)? I will not delve into these issues here, as they will be examined when considering (in the following chapter) the 'progress argument' put forward by Alston and Howard-Snyder, where a similar comparison between science and morality is made.

Does Wykstra's later development of the Parent Analogy fare any better? Rowe thinks it does not on the grounds that relevant disanalogies can again be found which discredit the comparisons that Wykstra wishes to make.[72] Rowe identifies the following points of dissimilarity:

(a) The parent, unlike God, does not prevent the child's suffering (due to, say, some virus) because the parent is either *unaware* of the cause of the suffering or *unable* to prevent the suffering.

(b) The parent, unlike God, does not prevent the child's suffering because the parent has other duties to fulfill (e.g., attend work) that preclude her from being in a position to prevent the suffering.

(c) The parent, unlike God, permits the child's suffering for the sake of distant goods due to having insufficient intelligence and ability to bring about the goods in the present or near future.

Rowe adds a fourth, and in his opinion, fatal disanalogy:

(d) When a loving parent intentionally permits her child to suffer intensely for the sake of a distant good that cannot otherwise be realized, the child:
  (i) is consciously aware of the direct presence, love and concern of the parent, and
  (ii) receives special assurances from the parent that (or why) the suffering (or the parent's permission of it) is necessary for some distant good.

On the other hand, enormous numbers of human beings undergo prolonged, horrendous suffering without being consciously aware of any divine presence, concern, and explanations.

I suspect Rowe has strayed quite significantly with the foregoing four points. To begin with, three of Rowe's disanalogies – viz., (a), (b), and (d) – are not relevant to the issues at hand. With regard to (a) and (b), there is no doubt that parents, to their great frustration, are often unable to prevent the sufferings of their children, and this may be attributed to such factors as the parents' limited knowledge and limited power. God, of course, is not limited in these respects. Thus, Rowe's point may be expressed as follows:

> The parent often allows their child to suffer because the parent is unable to prevent the suffering. God, on the other hand, allows us to suffer even though he can prevent the suffering.

But the mere fact that the parent cannot prevent the child's suffering does not provide us with any reason for thinking that the child would be unable to grasp her parent's purposes. For the disanalogy to be relevant, it must at least lead us to expect an epistemic gulf in the parent-child relationship (this, of course, will not suffice, for the disanalogy must also give us no grounds to expect a similar epistemic gulf in the God-human relationship).

A similar problem affects Rowe's fourth disanalogy, (d). Rowe's point here may be put as follows:

> When the parent allows their child to suffer, the parent attends directly to the child, comforting and reassuring the child. By contrast, when God allows us to suffer, we are often not consciously aware of any divine presence or concern.

Even if this constitutes a genuine difference between the behaviour of parents and God, it does nothing to show either that a child cannot be expected to grasp her parent's purposes, or that we can expect to discern God's intentions. In fact, (d) seems to be addressing an entirely separate issue, viz.: Would we expect a loving God, who permits his creatures to suffer for the sake of goods that are beyond their ken, to hide from them the fact that he exists or loves them and cares about them? The answer to this question, Rowe implies, can be found in the very analogies Wykstra appeals to. I would suggest, therefore, that Rowe, in drawing attention to (d), should be viewed not as attempting to identify a relevant disanalogy but as turning Wykstra's parent analogy on its head, employing it as an argument against the existence of God – this, indeed, is the crux of the problem of divine hiddenness, which is to be examined later.

This leaves us with disanalogy (c). As before, the point being made by Rowe may be expressed by distinguishing the following two properties:

To say of person S_1 that they possess property C' is to say that S_1 *has a high degree of intelligence and ability, and cares for the future of S_2 who is under S_1's providential care.*
To say of S_1 that they possess property D' is to say that S_1 *permits S_2 to undergo suffering for the sake of some future good.*

Assuming that S_1 is a parent and S_2 is the parent's child, Rowe's reply to Wykstra is in effect that if property C' is predicated of a parent, then D' can also be ascribed to the same parent *as long as* the parent in question lacks the following property:

(E') *Having sufficient intelligence and ability to bring about the relevant goods in the present or near future.*

Rowe can be thought of as arguing that S_1 has D' only because S_1 has both C' and $\sim E'$. But then it is not true that, probably, if a parent possesses C', then that parent also possesses D'. The requisite causal connection between C' and D' fails to obtain. If Rowe's argument here is sound, condition AN is not satisfied and Wykstra's analogy once again breaks down.

It seems, however, that the point made by Rowe in (c) is simply false, and hence no disanalogy at all has been uncovered. To see this, we may return to Wykstra's revised analogy. According to Wykstra, the greater the parents' intelligence the greater their concern for the future of their child, and the greater the material means at their disposal the more likely it is that in many of their present arrangements for their child (which may involve their child undergoing some hardship or suffering) a significant role would be played by goods that lie in the distant future. What Wykstra seems to have in mind are situations like those in which a parent encourages their child to complete a secondary school education, despite the hardships the child would thereby suffer, in order that the child may reap the benefits of this education in the long run. But in situations like this, the benefits or goods gained by means of the suffering or hardship – goods such as various social and vocational skills – *cannot* be acquired immediately or without the suffering (and even if they could be acquired immediately, it is perhaps better that they are not acquired in this way). Thus, parents sometimes justifiably allow their children to experience hardship and adversity for the sake of some future goods, and this is often due to the goods being incapable of existing sooner (or better for being distant). It is in this respect, Wykstra contends, that God is like human parents. But then (c) is no disanalogy at all – it is just false.

In short, none of the four disanalogies identified by Rowe succeed in overthrowing Wykstra's revised Parent Analogy. There remains, however, an insurmountable difficulty with Wykstra's revised analogy. As pointed out in Section 5.2, Wykstra assumes that a good that lies in the distant future is thereby beyond our ken. But the assumption that a future good is always an inscrutable good is dubious – at the very least, further argument is required to show that this assumption is worthy of acceptance. It may be concluded, therefore, that both versions of Wykstra's Parent Analogy fail to provide reasonable grounds for thinking it likely that the goods for which God permits many sufferings would be indiscernible to us.

In the previous chapter I began with a discussion of Wykstra's original version of CORNEA. It was seen that his initial formulation of CORNEA is flawed in certain respects but is nevertheless capable of reformulation in a more plausible way. It was also seen that CORNEA, suitably revised, applies to a quite different set of inferences than Swinburne's Principle of Credulity, and once the differences between these two epistemic principles is acknowledged much of the force behind alleged counterexamples to CORNEA disappears. Having thus arrived at an acceptable account of CORNEA, I then turned in the present chapter to the application of this principle to Rowe's evidential argument. In particular, I looked at Wykstra's attempt to employ CORNEA in an effort to undermine Rowe's case. I distinguished two CORNEA-inspired arguments in Wykstra's writings, one involving a straightforward appeal to divine omniscience and the other involving an appeal to the parent-child analogy. In each case, however, Wykstra's argument was found wanting. It may be concluded, therefore, that Wykstra has failed to advance the sceptical theist cause. It remains to be seen in the following chapter whether other sceptical theists have been more successful.

NOTES

[1]   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," pp. 82–83, and "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 127.

[2]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 122, 124–26, and Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 130.

[3]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 270.

[4]   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 135 – but as Wykstra observes (in his fn. 11, p. 148), establishing the equivalence of these two propositions is not a straightforward matter.

[5]   See Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis," p. 97. At this stage, of course, Rowe only has the original version of CORNEA or C_1 in mind, and so the presentation of Rowe's early exchange with Wykstra in the following paragraphs will be couched in terms of C_1. Nevertheless, this early exchange between Rowe and Wykstra is just as applicable to $C_{4.2}$.

[6]   A very different non-theistic response to CORNEA is advocated in a recent paper by Jon Pérez Laraudogoitia ("CORNEA against Theism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 48 (2000): 81–87). It is argued by Laraudogoitia that CORNEA, when applied to the evidential problem of evil, results in a defence of atheism that parallels Wykstra's defence of theism. Thus, CORNEA is of use only to the agnostic. This conclusion, however, is partly due to Laraudogoitia's reliance on a conception of CORNEA closer to C_1 than to C_4.

[7]   See Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis," p. 97. Cf. Jerome Gellman, *Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 185–87, where a similar interpretation of CORNEA is advocated.

[8]   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 132–36. According to Wykstra, it is Rowe's underlying perspective on defeaters that has led him to make this error in interpretation.

[9]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 125.

[10]   Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 79.

[11]   Cf. Gellman, *Experience of God and the Rationality of Theistic Belief*, pp. 185–87, and Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 26–27, both of whom place 'the burden of reasonability' on Wykstra.

[12]   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," pp. 87–91.

[13]   *Ibid.*, p. 91. It is important to note that Wykstra has altered his position somewhat. Instead of holding that it is quite likely that the goods for the sake of which God permits many sufferings would be beyond our ken, he now holds the more modest view that *it is just as likely as not* that these goods would be beyond our ken (see Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 136–37).

[14]   In the light of Rowe's reply to this argument, it is clear that he understands (10) to mean 'It is likely that the goods in relation to which God permits many sufferings are *presently* beyond our ken'.

[15]   See Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis," p. 98.

[16]   But to deduce (8) from (5) the following assumptions are also required: (a) There are unknown goods that justify God's permission of at least some cases of evil, and (b) Any good *G* that justifies God's permission of evil can only be unknown to us if *G* has yet to obtain.

[17]   See Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," pp. 38–39.

[18]   *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[19]   Daniel Howard-Snyder and John O'Leary-Hawthorne, "God, Schmod and Gratuitous Evil," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 53 (1993): 865. A sceptical theist may retort that, given the fact that God is omniscient and given the further fact that we are far from omniscient, it is highly likely that *for any given domain* God knows much more than we do. This reply, however, will not work if, for some given domain, we might be (or we would expect to be) the beneficiaries of divine revelation. I owe this suggestion to John Schellenberg.

[20]   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 141–42.

[21]   See Rowe, "Evil and the Theistic Hypothesis," pp. 95, 99–100.

[22]   In contrast to his earlier writings, Rowe now holds that ST does not include the claim that God created the world. For according to theists, God was free not to create a world, and so theism is only committed to the claim that any contingent beings that exist depend for their existence on God's creative act (see Rowe, "Grounds for Belief Aside," p. 136, fn. 2).

[23]   See Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 91.

[24]   See Rowe's entry on deism in Craig (ed.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 2, pp. 853–56.

[25]   Although Rowe does not explicitly present RST in this way in his earlier writings, he makes his position unmistakably clear in his recent "Grounds for Belief Aside" (p. 125). Failure to appreciate

Rowe's conception of RST is particularly evident in Edward Martin's *The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy* (PhD dissertation, Purdue University, 1995), pp. 123–28, where it is claimed that Rowe thinks of RST as including, for example, the belief in life after death and in a divine judgment of human agents.

[26]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 264, and "God and Evil", p. 7. However, I have come to suspect, from a recent paper presented by Rowe (entitled "Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil," presented at Purdue University, 2 April 2005) where he recounts his early exchange with Wykstra, that what motivated Rowe to reject (24) is the principle I call the 'sufferer-centred requirement' in Chapter 7, Section 2. In line with this principle, Rowe claims, in reply to Wykstra, that the goods in relation to which God permits our sufferings would likely be known to us, since such goods would invariably involve those who have suffered. And so if these goods were beyond our ken, that can only be because they have yet to occur and we have yet to experience them. But, Rowe adds, there is little reason to think that all such goods would be postponed for some distant future. On this view, then, (24) turns out false.

[27]   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 141.

[28]   *Ibid*., pp. 142–45.

[29]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 240.

[30]   *Ibid*.; cf. Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 79.

[31]   Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil" (unpublished ms., read at SUNY Buffalo, September 14, 2000), section 1.

[32]   Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 79. This interpretation is bolstered by Rowe's reference in footnote 16 of "Ruminations about Evil" (p. 88) to pp. 157–60 in Russell and Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil," where a similar comparison is drawn between EST and old-earth creationism.

[33]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 240, fn.16, emphases his.

[34]   On how this principle is derived from the axioms of the probability calculus, see Richard Swinburne's *An Introduction to Confirmation Theory* (London: Methuen and Co., 1973), p. 51, principle *e*.

[35]   Beilby, "Does the Empirical Problem of Evil Prove that Theism is Improbable?" *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 321.

[36]   The agnostic thesis, particularly as developed by William Alston, is similar to Wykstra's position that one cannot infer from any instance of suffering that it serves no God-justifying good, for even if there were such a good, we would not be able to discern it. Alston, similarly, puts forward AT as the thesis that, in virtue of our cognitive limitations, we are not in a position to justifiably assert that there are no God-justifying goods connected to instances of suffering (see Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 30). However, unlike Wykstra, Alston develops his case without appealing to any general epistemic principle, but by drawing on the resources of various theodicies.

[37]   This distinction originated in Pollock's "The Structure of Epistemic Justification," *American Philosophical Quarterly* monograph series 4 (1970): 73–74, and was developed further in his *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 42–43, and in *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), pp. 38–39.

[38]   Cf. Wykstra's view that, although Rowe sees CORNEA as a strategy for providing undercutting defeaters, Rowe's conception of undercutting defeaters differs radically from his own, and therein lies the underlying source of their dispute (see Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 133–36).

[39]   See Beilby, "Does the Empirical Problem of Evil Prove that Theism is Improbable?" pp. 321–23.

[40]   Adams appears to have raised the objection that follows when Rowe presented his paper, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," at a conference at the University of Nebraska in April 1984. Unfortunately, Adams has not published his views and so these only survive in the form given to them by Rowe in footnote 16 of the aforementioned paper.

[41]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 241, fn. 16.

[42]   *Ibid*., emphasis his.

[43]   See Sennett, "The Inscrutable Evil Defense," pp. 225–26.

[44]   Rowe, "Grounds for Belief Aside," p. 125.

[45]   The many variations in the concept of simplicity are outlined well by Mario Bunge, *The Myth of Simplicity: Problems of Scientific Philosophy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), chs 4 and 5; and Mary Hesse, "Simplicity," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), vol. 7, pp. 446–48.

[46]   This indicates that simplicity may not be language invariant – that is to say, one theory or hypothesis may rank as simpler than another when both are formulated in language L', but the opposite may be the case when both are formulated in a different language L''.

[47]   On Swinburne's appeal to simplicity as the crucial determinant of prior probability, see his *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 51–57, and his 1997 Aquinas Lecture, *Simplicity as Evidence of Truth* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1997), much of which is repeated in his *Epistemic Justification* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), pp. 83–102.

[48]   Plantinga, "Is Theism Really a Miracle?" *Faith and Philosophy* 3 (1986): 131.

[49]   Cf. Elliott Sober's view that appeals to parsimony in science always involve an implicit commitment to a background theory regarding the way the world is, though not necessarily to a theory that the world is simple (*Reconstructing the Past: Parsimony, Evolution, and Inference*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1988, esp. ch. 2).

[50]   See, for example, Mario Bunge, *The Myth of Simplicity*, pp. 96–98; Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 87–88; and W.H. Newton-Smith, *The Rationality of Science* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 230–31.

[51]   As this indicates, I am not entirely happy with the rejection of the *simplex sigillum veri* doctrine. Perhaps this doctrine, like many fundamental epistemic principles, is something that cannot be shown to be true in any non-question-begging way, but must nevertheless be accepted as true if the very project of empirical science is to be possible. Swinburne defends simplicity along these lines in *Epistemic Justification*, p. 102.

[52]   In personal correspondence (dated March 31, 2002), Rowe has indicated that his case against EST is best understood as follows: a given proposition *P* has a greater initial probability than the conjunction of *P* with some independent proposition *Q*, since there are more ways that the conjunction (*P* & *Q*) can be false than ways in which its first conjunct can be false; but since EST consists of a conjunction of propositions over and above those entailed by RST, the initial probability of EST is lower than that of RST.

This is, I suggest, a new argument against EST – or, more precisely, a new argument in support of (23) – not explicitly found in Rowe's published writings. The basic assumption of this argument is that the *scope* of a theory is an *a priori* measure of its probability, where scope refers to the number of claims the theory makes and hence the number of ways it can be falsified. This seems quite plausible, especially when considered in the light of possible worlds: if *P* and *Q* are contingent, then (*P* & *Q*) would be false in more possible worlds than *P* alone, and so (*P* & *Q*) is more likely to be false than just *P*. There are, however, a number of worries with this appeal to scope. For one thing, it may be difficult or impossible to compare the scope of the theories under

scrutiny (although in the case of RST and EST it is fairly uncontroversial as to which is greater in scope). More importantly, the appeal to scope would fail if *P* and *Q* are necessary propositions. All necessary truths would be assigned a probability value of 1, and given that they have maximal probability, they should all have the same, narrow scope. But, clearly, not all necessary truths have the same scope, let alone a scope that is narrow. Rowe's appeal to scope, therefore, would be ruled out if RST and EST are thought to embody necessary truths. (A similar problem affects the appeal to simplicity: all necessary truths have the same probability value, but not all necessary truths are equally simple.) In any case, theists who accept a version of EST may hold that what is lost by way of scope is more than offset by way of other criteria for theory choice. This suggests an important limitation in any case against EST premised on the alleged low intrinsic probability of EST: whether it is (in some sense) legitimate to move from RST to EST in order to account for God's permission of evil depends not merely on the *a priori* probability of EST (as measured by such criteria as scope and simplicity), but also on the *a posteriori* probability of EST (as measured by such criteria as predictive accuracy and fit with background evidence).

53   Chrzan, "Debunking CORNEA," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 21 (1987): 173. Richard Otte raises the same objection against Paul Draper's argument from evil and evidential arguments from evil in general ("Evidential Arguments from Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 48 (2000): 1–10).

54   Fitzpatrick, "The Onus of Proof in Arguments about the Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 17 (1981): 27, emphasis his.

55   Stephen Wykstra, in "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp. 140–41, also rejects Rowe's restriction to RST. Wykstra begins by considering two distinct questions:

(Q1) Is our 'noseeum evidence' *E* [i.e., our inability to see any goods that would justify God in permitting *E*1 and *E*2] expectable from the *mere* hypothesis of RST? That is, does RST tautologously make *E* expectable?

(Q2) Is *E* expectable from RST *together* with other things which we know independently of commitment to RST, and which are not themselves adverse to RST in relation to its rivals? That is, does RST contingently make *E* expectable?

He then claims that, if we look at the way in which fundamental scientific hypotheses (such as 'light is particle-like') are confirmed or disconfirmed, it is clear that the right question to ask is not (Q1) but (Q2) when considering the impact of certain evidence on a hypothesis such as RST. See also Stephen Napier, "Is Rowe Committed to an Expanded Version of Theism?" *Sophia* 41 (2002): 31–40, where a very different set of arguments against Rowe's restriction to RST is offered.

56   I am indebted here to the expositions on analogical reasoning provided by Irving M. Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, 3rd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 305–21; Wesley C. Salmon, *Logic*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), pp. 97–100; William H. Shaw and L.R. Ashley, "Analogy and Inference," *Dialogue* 22 (1983): 415–32; and David H. Helman (ed.), *Analogical Reasoning: Perspectives of Artificial Intelligence, Cognitive Science, and Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988), esp. Part III.

57   Cf. John Stuart Mill's view that the strength of an analogical inference is solely or chiefly measured by the number of similarities and dissimilarities shared by the objects between which the analogy is drawn (*A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive*, London: Longman, 1970 [originally published 1843], Book III, ch. 20, esp. pp. 365–67), a view correctly dismissed as inadequate by many – see, for example, Todd R. Davies, "Determination, Uniformity, and Relevance: Normative Criteria for Generalization and Reasoning by Analogy," in Helman (ed.), *Analogical Reasoning*, pp. 227–31.

[58]   Copi, *Introduction to Logic*, p. 314, emphasis his. The role of causality in analogical infer-
ences is also emphasized by Mary Hesse, *Models and Analogies in Science* (London: Sheed and
Ward, 1963), ch. 2, esp. pp. 85–96. Wesley Salmon, by contrast, states that background knowledge
is necessary to determine which resemblances are relevant (*Logic*, p. 100).

[59]   An interesting consequence of the above criterion is that the appeal to analogy in analogical
arguments can – at least in some cases – be eliminated and replaced by an appeal to a certain sort
of universal quantification. However, the fact that the quantified statement in (AN) involves quan-
tifying into probabilistic contexts may be worrisome to some – on this, see Howard Smokler,
"Three Grades of Probabilistic Involvement," *Philosophical Studies* 32 (1977): 129–42.

[60]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 275.

[61]   Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," p. 39, emphasis his.

[62]   Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 88.

[63]   Sennett, "The Inscrutable Evil Defense," p. 226.

[64]   *Ibid*., p. 226. A similar defence of Wykstra's parent analogy is given by Garth Hallett, "Evil
and Human Understanding," *Heythrop Journal* 32 (1991): 468–70.

[65]   However, in such cases of incomprehension the child usually has the benefit of the direct
presence, love and special assurances of her parents, all of which appear to be lacking in the
divine/human case. The implications of this disanalogy will be considered in section 6.4 below.

[66]   See Wykstra and Russell, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil," pp.145–47.

[67]   *Ibid*., p. 146.

[68]   See Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," pp.143–45. As John Beaudoin points
out ("Evil, the Human Cognitive Condition, and Natural Theology," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998):
406–07), these attempts by Wykstra to strengthen his original parent analogy conflict with his
newly adopted modest position that *P* is as likely as not given *G & k* (refer to fn. 13 above).

[69]   See Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," pp. 77–79.

[70]   Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil," p. 142.

[71]   Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," p. 210.

[72]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 274–76, "God and
Evil," pp. 7–8, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., pp.102–03, and "Grounds for
Belief Aside," pp. 129–31.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

(Isaiah 55: 8–9)

If, therefore, the depth of God's riches, wisdom, and knowledge is boundless, if his judgments are unsearchable and his ways inscrutable, if his gift is indescribable and his peace surpasses all understanding, not only mine or yours or that of anyone, not only that of Peter and Paul, but even the understanding of the archangels and the powers above, tell me what kind of defense or pardon you will have for submitting yourself to such madness and folly, desiring to comprehend the unsearchable and demanding an explanation of God's provident acts?

(John Chrysostom, *On Providence*, 2:11, trans. Christopher Hall)

6. FURTHER OBJECTIONS TO ROWE'S NOSEEUM ASSUMPTION

One of the characteristic elements of Rowe's argument from evil is the commitment to the noseeum inference from inscrutable to pointless evil. We have seen in the previous chapter that the reasonableness of this inference is dependent in large part on the reasonableness of Rowe's noseeum assumption (hereafter, RNA), according to which, if there were reasons that justify God in permitting horrendous evil, we would most likely be cognizant of these reasons.[1] However, RNA conflicts with the sceptical theist's appraisal of the scope and limits of human knowledge of God. As Plantinga asks rhetorically, "Why suppose that if God *does* have a reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know?"[2] The challenge remains, however, for sceptical theists to develop this cognitive diffidence into an argument against RNA. Wykstra's attempt to do so, as we have seen, does not succeed. The aim of the present chapter, therefore, is to examine some further considerations, other than those appealed to by Wykstra, that have been put forward against RNA. But what can be offered in support of RNA must also be considered, and so in the next chapter I will turn to some arguments that purport to discharge the 'burden of reasonability' carried by Rowe. Ultimately, I hope to come closer to a determination regarding the plausibility of the crucial inference from inscrutability to pointlessness embedded in Rowe's evidential argument.

1   HOWARD-SNYDER'S ARGUMENT FROM COMPLEX GOODS

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1   HOWARD-SNYDER'S ARGUMENT FROM COMPLEX GOODS

I will begin this extended examination of the case against RNA by considering two arguments centred around the notion of complexity, the first of

which has been put forward by Daniel Howard-Snyder. But before outlining Howard-Snyder's argument, it is important to say something about his general strategy.[3] He points out that, in arguing against a noseeum assumption, one may be striving to show one of two different things: the assumption in question is false *or* the assumption is such that we have good reason to be in doubt about how likely it is. To illustrate the former approach, suppose that I am looking at a tree in the nearby park from my office window on the twentieth floor. I then assert 'There is no spider on that tree' on the basis that I cannot see a spider there. To defeat this noseeum inference, various considerations could be put forward to show that the underlying noseeum assumption – that I would very likely see a spider on the tree if one were there – is clearly false (e.g., the limited visual capacities of the unaided human eye). On the other hand, consider the inference from 'We have not found any signs of life elsewhere in the universe' to 'There is no life elsewhere in the universe'. The noseeum assumption here is: more likely than not, we would detect extraterrestrial life-forms if there were any. To determine the truth of this assumption, however, we would need to determine the probability of several other propositions: e.g., extraterrestrial life-forms, should they exist, would be intelligent enough to contact us, or would care to contact us even if they were sufficiently intelligent, or would have the means at their disposal to contact us even if they were sufficiently intelligent and cared to do so. The problem is that our exobiological evidence is so miniscule that we cannot with any degree of confidence assign any probability (whether it be low, middling, or high) to these propositions. Therefore, the only appropriate attitude to adopt is to be *in doubt* about whether 'More likely than not, we would detect extraterrestrial life-forms if there were any.' That is to say, it is not reasonable to make any judgment about the likelihood of this noseeum assumption – we ought to suspend judgment.[4]

These two strategies may be applied to RNA. One may aim to show that it is very likely that we would not see any God-justifying reason for instances of suffering even if there were such reasons. In that case, the contention would be that RNA is *false*. Alternatively, one may adopt the more modest strategy of showing that we should be *in doubt* about whether we would very likely see a God-justifying reason. In this case, it is no more reasonable to affirm RNA than to refrain from affirming RNA. In either case, however, it is claimed that there is sufficient reason to deny that it is reasonable to believe that RNA is likely to be true.

Howard-Snyder follows the latter of the two strategies when putting forward his argument from complexity. He is, in other words, offering a reason to be in doubt about RNA, rather than a reason to think it is false. His

justification for doing so is that "reasons to be in doubt are easier to come by and the only reasons I can think of for believing that it [RNA] is false presuppose that God has informed us that we should expect to be unable to discern his purposes in permitting evil."[5] His argument from complexity will therefore be judged according to whether it provides a good reason to be in doubt about RNA. Other arguments against RNA will be evaluated on the same basis, even though their authors may have put them forward in order to establish that RNA is false. In this way, the case against Rowe's noseeum inference will be presented in the strongest possible terms.

Turning to Howard-Snyder's argument from complexity, he introduces it as follows:

> One thing Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4, Ste. Michele's Cabernet Sauvignon (Reserve), and the best sorts of love have in common when compared to Chopsticks, cheap Gallo, and puppy love is that each illustrates the fact that the goodness of a state of affairs is sometimes greater, in part, because it is more complex. Now, since intense, underserved suffering and horrific wickedness are so bad, it would take correspondingly greater goods to justify God's permitting such horrors. Hence, it would not be surprising if the greater goods involved in God's purposes possess a degree of complexity well beyond our grasp. It follows that it would not be surprising if there were *greater* goods outside our ken.[6]

The argument may be represented schematically in the following way:

(1) *E*1 and *E*2, being instances of horrific suffering, must serve goods of great magnitude in order to justify God's permission of them.
(2) In some cases, the more complex a good state of affairs is, the greater is its degree of goodness or value.
(3) In some cases, the complexity of a good state of affairs prevents us from discerning its goodness or value.
(4) (Therefore) It would not be surprising if God's reasons for permitting *E*1 and *E*2 involved highly complex states of affairs that are of immense goodness or value and, in virtue of their complexity, are beyond our ken.

This argument, according to Howard-Snyder, provides us with good reason to be in doubt as to whether it is highly likely that we would see a greater good if there were one. But does it succeed in this respect?

Let's begin with (3), the claim that complexity is a hindrance to the discernment of value. Against this, it may be objected that, although there are

goods such as friendship and love that are highly complex and thus not entirely within our grasp, we are capable of recognizing such states of affairs as being good and valuable. Complexity, therefore, need not adversely affect our ability to recognize the value of a state of affairs. This objection, however, poses no challenge to (3), which merely claims that complexity can, and sometimes does, hinder the discernment of value. And this claim seems eminently plausible. As Howard-Snyder points out,

> Why can a child discern the literary merits of a comic book but not *Henry V* or *The Brothers Karamazov*? Why can a child clearly discern the aesthetic value of toffee but have a difficult time with alder-smoked Copper River sockeye served with pesto, lightly buttered asparagus *al dente*, fresh greens in a ginger vinegarette, and chilled chardonnay? Why can a child recognize the value of his friendship with his buddy next door but not the full value of his parents' mutual love? Surely because great works of literature, fine cuisine and adult love at its best involves much more than he is able to comprehend … Value is often veiled in complexity.[7]

As with (3), the point behind (2) is not that the complexity of a state of affairs necessarily influences its goodness or value, but only that it can and sometimes does. Therefore, all that follows from (2) and (3), in conjunction with (1), is that "it would not be surprising" if goods beyond our ken figured in God's purposes. That is to say, given the facts spelt out in premises (1)–(3), it is epistemically possible (or consistent with all we know) that the goods served by $E1$ and $E2$ are, in virtue of their magnitude, highly complex goods and consequently beyond our ken. Thus, for all we know, RNA is false – this may not be sufficient reason to take RNA to be false, but it would at least permit us to be in doubt about its truth.

Although this argument may have some appeal, it also leads to highly counterintuitive consequences. But my attempt to establish this will be deferred till we consider another argument offered by Howard-Snyder against RNA – viz., the so-called progress argument – for this shares the same defect as the argument from complex goods.[8]

2   DURSTON'S ARGUMENT FROM THE COMPLEXITY OF HISTORY

Another objection to RNA based on complexity of a different kind has been suggested by Kirk Durston. The central premise in Durston's argument

is that history is 'consequentially complex.' By this he means that "history is composed of a web of innumerable interacting causal chains, many of which are composed of millions of discrete events."[9] As a result, "changing one event not only changes the entire causal chain from that point onward to the end of history, it also changes the evolution of all other causal chains that interact with the revised causal chain at any point in the future."[10] To highlight the consequential complexity of history, Durston imagines what may have transpired had Winston Churchill's mother, on the night her son was conceived early in 1874, fallen asleep in a slightly different position so that "the precise pathway that each of the millions of spermatozoa took would have been slightly altered."[11] The odds are, according to Durston, that an individual with a very different chromosomal combination than Winston Churchill's would have been born, "with the likely result that the evolution of World War II would have been substantially different from what actually took place."[12] Thus, an apparently insignificant event (the sleeping position of Churchill's mother on the night in question) had consequences of great moral significance that could not have been recognized until many years later.

Durston goes on to outline the implications of the complexity of history on evidential arguments from gratuitous evil.[13] He begins with the commonly accepted definition of gratuitous evil: an evil is gratuitous if and only if God could have prevented it without forfeiting some greater good or permitting some equally bad or worse evil. Given this definition, to determine whether a particular evil is gratuitous we must have at our disposal two bodies of data:

(a) the instance of evil E together with its morally significant consequences, and
(b) the morally significant consequences of substituting E with some other event.

The first set of data would inform us of the negative intrinsic value of the initial evil event along with the intrinsic values of all the consequences of that evil event that will be actualized to the end of history. Thus, the overall net value of the initial evil event (call it 'A') is the sum of all the intrinsic values, both positive and negative, of that event together with all its actual consequences.[14] Durston states this schematically as follows:

$$A = E + C_1 + C_2 + C_3 + \cdots + C_{end}$$

However, according to the thesis of the complexity of history, a single event leads to an exponentially increasing number of consequences, affecting an

increasing number of causal chains. Therefore, the consequences that flow from E are likely to include billions or more discrete events. In that case, our knowledge of the consequences of E would clearly be miniscule in comparison with the entire set of E's consequences to the end of history. If we were therefore asked to adopt one of the following three positions,

  (i) A is positive
 (ii) A is negative
(iii) We do not know whether A is positive or negative, the most rationally defensible position to take could only be (iii).

A similar problem affects the second body of data relating to the consequences of preventing E in favour of some other event. This set of data informs us of the overall value of the best alternative that God could actualize (call this 'B'), where this value is the sum of the intrinsic value of S – the event that God substitutes for E – and the intrinsic values of all the consequences of S. Put schematically:

$$B = S + C_{B1} + C_{B2} + C_{B3} + \cdots + C_{B\text{-end}}$$

Calculating the value of B, however, proves to be just as difficult as calculating the value of A. If S takes the place of E, the consequences that follow from S would include the subsequent decisions of free agents. In other words, the elements in the chain C_{B1}, C_{B2} and so on would mainly consist of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom. But then to know the consequences of substituting E with S would require nothing less than middle knowledge. Lacking such knowledge, we cannot know what free decisions would be made subsequent to S, and so we are unable to ascertain the value of B.

The conclusion drawn by Durston is that we cannot know what constitutes the best alternative for God to actualize. One may agree with this, however, while insisting that we do know of *better* alternatives open to God, for surely we can imagine a world better than ours, perhaps in virtue of containing S but not E. But Durston rejects this commonsensical assumption. He argues that if the alternative world in question (call it W) includes the decisions of free agents, then we do not know if God can actualize W. For whether W includes S but not E is not up to God alone, but also depends on the free decisions of W's inhabitants. But the inhabitants of W may never make all the necessary free decisions, under any possible circumstances, in order to bring about S rather than E. Due to our lack of middle knowledge, we do not know what decisions such free agents would make and thus we do not know whether God can actualize W.[15] We are therefore unable to postulate what may constitute a better, let alone the best, alternative for God to

actualize, thus giving us further reason to think that attempts at calculating *B* are doomed to failure. Once again, agnosticism over the value of *B* seems the most rational position to adopt.

Durston then proceeds to show how this agnosticism leads to grave difficulties for nontheists like Rowe and Russell who develop atheological arguments based on gratuitous evils. To judge whether an evil is gratuitous, we must compare *A* and *B*. More precisely, if the difference between the values of *A* and *B* is positive (in which case, the value of *E* along with its consequences is greater than the value of the alternatives), then God is justified in permitting the given evil. Conversely, if the difference between *A* and *B* is negative, then God is not justified in permitting the evil. This suggests the following definition of gratuitous evil:

(*G*) An instance of evil *E* is gratuitous if and only if $A - B$ is negative.[16]

Due to the complexity of history, however, we lack virtually all the data necessary to determine the values of *A* and *B*. Durston compares our predicament *vis-à-vis* gratuitous evil with the attempt to establish whether $A - B$ is positive or negative in relation to the following problem:

$$A = -7 + 2 - 3 + 1 + 2 + \text{millions of unknown numbers}$$
$$\text{of unknown sign.}$$
$$B = 4 + 2 + \text{millions of additional unknown numbers}$$
$$\text{of unknown sign.}$$

Just as we could not fail to be agnostic about the sign of $A - B$ in this case, so too we cannot determine, with respect to any evil or group of evils, that $A - B$ for such evils is negative and therefore gratuitous. The complexity of history thus undermines evidential arguments from evil that begin with our observations of evils that appear to be gratuitous.

Although Durston does not relate his argument to RNA, a clear connection can be made. According to RNA, if *E* serves an outweighing good then it is likely that we would discern this good. Durston, however, attempts to show that, given our almost complete lack of information regarding the consequences of *E* as well as our insufficient knowledge regarding better alternatives, we are in no position to determine whether or not there is an outweighing good for *E*, even if there does happen to be one. Durston's argument from complexity thus implies that RNA is false. However, this argument, whether taken to imply that RNA is false or only that we should be in doubt over RNA, is open to two fatal objections, or so I will argue.

Objection 1 – If Durston is correct, then for any evil *E* that takes place in our world, we cannot determine whether or not *E* is gratuitous – put

differently, we cannot determine whether or not God was justified in permitting *E*. And this because of our lack of knowledge of the data necessary to make well-grounded determinations of the aforementioned sort. But if this is the case with actual evil states of affairs, why could it not also apply to actual good states of affairs? Paralleling Durston's argument, one may argue that we are never in a position to determine whether God is justified in allowing a good event *G* to take place, for to determine this we would need to know all the consequences that flow from *G* till the end of history as well as all the consequences of substituting *G* with a state of affairs of lesser intrinsic value. Consider, however, the following patently good state of affairs: donating money to a children's hospital. Can we justifiably assert that God, should he exist, would be justified in permitting this good to take place? Apparently not, if Durston's argument is followed to its logical conclusion.

This points to the underlying problem with Durston's argument: it takes for granted unreasonably high standards for making acceptable moral or evaluative judgments. In many cases, we do not need to know the remote and indirect consequences of a particular action or event in order to make an adequate judgment regarding its overall value. In donating money to a charity, in providing food and shelter to one's children, in caring for one's sickly grandmother, and in numerous other instances the action in question can be deemed to be good – and thus God is justified in permitting it – regardless of our incomplete knowledge of the consequences such actions may have in the distant future. In like manner, knowledge of the overall value of an evil event need not presuppose extensive knowledge regarding its consequences. Clearly, we can justifiably assert that many evils (e.g., lying to one's wife, the theft of a car) are underwritten by outweighing goods (e.g., free will) even though we do not know the impact such evils have on events taking place in centuries to come.

But there is an additional reason for taking remote consequences to be irrelevant to the question of whether a particular evil serves a greater good. It is sometimes held that God could not be justified in permitting an instance of suffering for the sake of some good unless the sufferer partakes of that good. Although this view will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter, if it is correct then the goods served by evil must be present at some point during the sufferer's (pre- or post-mortem) life, otherwise that person will have no opportunity to share in the relevant goods. If this is the case, however, there is simply no need to examine the causal chain extending from the death of the suffering individual to the end of history when considering what purpose, if any, was served by the evil endured by that individual. One need only focus on the goods that could be realized in the course of the sufferer's life. Considerations such as these undercut

Durston's scepticism regarding our ability to determine whether God could have a morally sufficient reason for permitting instances of evil.[17]

Objection 2 – A second difficulty with Durston's case concerns his claim that, due to a lack of middle knowledge, we have no way of knowing whether there was an alternative better than *E* that God could have actualized. As we have seen, an objection that quickly comes to mind is that we have little trouble imagining worlds better than ours. It therefore seems that we do know of better alternatives that were open to God. Rowe makes this point forcefully in relation to *E*2:

> Consider all those possible worlds with (as much as possible) the same past as the actual world but in which God brings it about that the little girl's attacker is so overcome with sorrow on seeing the terror in her face that he lets her go, physically unharmed. Undoubtedly, some of these worlds are worse than the actual world and many are better. Is it reasonable to believe that an omnipotent being was unable to create any of these better worlds, rather than the actual world? It seems incredible that this should be so.[18]

Similarly, nearby possible worlds in which prior to New Year's Day of 1986 (when *E*2 took place) the little girl dies peacefully in her sleep or her attacker is seized by a fatal heart attack are clearly better alternatives, and it is difficult to see why God would be incapable of creating one of them. To be sure, Durston does not claim that God cannot create such worlds, but only that we do not know if he can due to our lack of middle knowledge. Durston's point here is that we simply do not know whether, in any alternative world inhabited by significantly free agents, such agents would make all the necessary free decisions to ensure that *E*2 does not take place. If these possible free creatures do not in any circumstances make the requisite decisions, then the better world in question cannot eventuate, and so even God would be powerless to bring it about. This, however, overlooks the fact that God could, as in Rowe's hypothetical scenario, directly intervene to prevent *E*2. Furthermore, even if it is granted that we do not know which better worlds God can actualize, it seems implausible that God cannot actualize any of them.

Durston's response to this line of thought is startling. "We are mistaken," he writes, "if we believe that we can think of a better world."[19] He bases this position on the following considerations drawn from the complexity of history:

(A) "We do not have sufficient knowledge of the world's causal chains and individual effects to know what this world is like to the end of

history. If we do not know what this world is like to the end of history, then it is impossible for us to compare it to other worlds to see if they are better."[20]

(B) "The complexity of history prevents us from knowing what any alternative world would be like to the end of its history if we deleted just one event."[21]

In response to (A), suppose that there are two possible worlds, W_1 and W_2, with the former being actual and containing $E2$ while the latter being merely possible and lacking $E2$. Suppose further that W_1 and W_2 share the same past up to some point reasonably close to when $E2$ actually occurred. At that point, God intervenes in W_2 so that the little girl dies peacefully in her sleep. We may also suppose that the subsequent history of both W_1 and W_2 is not significantly different. In that case, *contra* (A), we can compare these two worlds even though we do not know much about them. All we know is that W_1 and W_2 are identical in nearly all respects, and that is sufficient to judge which of the two is preferable from a moral standpoint.

This response, however, does not take into account the point made in (B). The foregoing scenario depicted with respect to W_2 may be misleading, for as Durston points out,

Given the consequential complexity of history, when we propose deleting a particular event from the world, we are actually proposing deleting all the billions of consequences of the event strewn throughout myriads of interrelated causal chains stretching to the end of history. The deletion or substitution of just one event is actually the deletion or substitution of an entire complex branch of history that may be so large as to affect the entire historical network at some point in the future.[22]

Thus, by deleting $E2$ we may not end up with a world such as W_2 whose subsequent course of history is very much like that found in the actual world. Rather, in light of the consequential complexity of history, it is quite possible (if not highly likely) that the deletion of $E2$ would lead to a world with a radically different future. But if we do not know what the future in W_2 would be like, we cannot compare this alternative world to our world. Durston therefore concludes that "the activity of thinking of better worlds is not an activity humans are capable of."[23]

Durston rightly emphasizes the effects of deleting an event from history, as this can easily be disregarded when considering the value or purpose of a particular evil. However, the conclusion Durston draws from this seems to go well beyond the facts of the matter. Undoubtedly, the consequences of deleting

or substituting $E2$ from our world would be far-reaching, though it is difficult to say how far they would reach. Nevertheless, one would suppose that in deleting $E2$ it is likely that the consequences would be better than those that result from the actual occurrence of $E2$. But even if we assume that in some worlds the consequences are no better or even worse, surely there are also some worlds in which the consequences *are* better. Our lack of precise knowledge as to what our world and nearby possible worlds are like to the end of history is no impediment to seeing that at least some nearby worlds would have a brighter future than ours in virtue of not containing $E2$.[24]

3   THE PROGRESS ARGUMENT

This argument originated with William Alston and has subsequently been defended by Daniel Howard-Snyder. Alston begins by charting some of the conceptual developments in philosophy:

> No one explicitly realized the distinction between concrete and abstract entities, the distinction between efficient and final causes, the distinction between knowledge and opinion, until great creative thinkers adumbrated these distinctions and disseminated them to their fellows.[25]

He then turns to the many advances made within science:

> The development of physical science has made us aware of a myriad of things hitherto undreamed of, and developed the concepts with which to grasp them – gravitation, electricity, electromagnetic fields, space-time curvature, irrational numbers, and so on. It is an irresistible induction from this that we have not reached the final term of this process, and that more realities, aspects, properties, structures remain to be discerned and conceptualized.[26]

Alston then proceeds to ask:

> Why should values, and the conditions of their realization, be any exception to this generalization? A history of the apprehension of values could undoubtedly be written, parallel to the history just adumbrated, though the archeology would be a more difficult and delicate task.[27]

Howard-Snyder develops this line of thought by sketching a speculative history of our species' ability to conceive of good states of affairs, calling this 'The Story.'[28] It begins with the evolution of life on our planet but

moves quickly to the appearance of hominids and in particular the emergence of *Homo sapiens*, whose highly developed brain gave it the capacity to conceptualize states of affairs as being good or bad. The moral development of our species is said to proceed as follows:

- *Neanderthal man* develops pro-attitudes towards things that issue in pleasant feelings, but only tens of thousands of years later – around 30,000–40,000 BCE – is an association made between subjective states or preferences ('I don't like it') and value ('That sort of thing is bad').
- About 25,000 BCE *Homo sapiens* learn to divorce the concept of the good from pleasurable experiences and the concept of the bad from pain.
- Between 19,000 and 22,000 BCE friendship is conceived as good and desirable, while loneliness is recognized as bad and undesirable.
- From 17,000 to 13,000 BCE the values of freedom, truth and knowledge are recognized, as are various attitudes and dispositions that are conducive to familial and communal relationships (e.g., honesty and kindness).
- About 10,000 BCE some members of the species recognize fidelity and respect for proper authority as good things. However, a period of great stagnancy in moral development follows.
- With the rise of the Greek, Indian and Asian civilizations around 6000 BCE, a number of further goods are discerned and articulated, including temperance, 'proper' pride, justice, and piety.
- The emergence of Judeo-Christianity 2000–3000 years ago leads to the recognition of selfless charity and humility as intrinsic goods, and lust and avarice as evils. Howard-Snyder adds, "Most members of the species have yet to catch on to this latest development."[29]

The feature of the above story that Howard-Snyder wishes to highlight is that "if it is true, the discovery of what is good by our ancestors spanned tens of thousands of years dotted with millennia-long gaps when nothing new was learned."[30] Howard-Snyder, of course, is not offering this story as historical fact. He does claim, however, that there is no *a priori* reason nor even any *a posteriori* reason to doubt it: "What skeletal remains, relics, cave drawings and manuscripts we have provide no reason at all to believe that the ability of *Homo sapiens* to conceive of what is good did not involve sporadic, lengthy progress."[31] But such a sporadic progression strongly suggests that there remain goods to be discovered, goods of which we are presently ignorant. Howard-Snyder therefore concludes that, given what we have to go on, it would not be surprising if there are goods outside our ken.[32]

Initially, Howard-Snyder cautioned that all that can be inferred from this conclusion is that it would come as no surprise if we happened to be ignorant

of some good states of affairs. The progress argument, in other words, is unable on its own to show that it would not be surprising if there are goods beyond our ken *that would justify God's permission of E1 and E2*.[33] More recently, however, Howard-Snyder has argued that this stronger claim regarding God-justifying goods being beyond our ken follows from the progress argument in conjunction with the fact that "nothing we reasonably believe rules out the possibility that some [goods outside our ken] actually obtain, or will obtain, and that if we fully grasped them, we would clearly see that they justify God's permission of so much horrific evil rather than a lot less."[34] This, contends Howard-Snyder, give us good reason to be in doubt regarding the truth of RNA.

Turning to some of the problems faced by the progress argument, it is important to notice that this argument is analogical in character: the progress made in various fields of inquiry is compared with the progress made in the apprehension of values, and from this it is inferred that just as progress in areas such as biology and physics indicates that there are aspects of reality of which we are ignorant, so too the history of our discovery of value indicates that there are more intrinsic goods than meet the mind's eye. One may challenge this argument by objecting to some feature of the analogy being drawn. William Rowe, for example, contends that it is implausible to hold that a history of values paralleling the history of physical science could be written. The reason for this is that science "concerns empirical matters the determination of which depends greatly on technological advances."[35] Thus, technological innovations such as microscopes and particle accelerators have led to the discovery of, among other things, DNA and quarks. By contrast, "in the area of values … the question of whether a given state of affairs is *intrinsically good* is not an empirical matter at all … [but] is a matter of necessity to be discerned by the comprehending intellect."[36] The nonempirical nature of axiology thus suggests that there cannot be any progress in the knowledge of values matching the progress of science.

Rowe's response contains an element of truth in that the further we move away from the natural sciences and technology, the more difficult it becomes to substantiate claims to progress.[37] Nevertheless, it is far from clear that nonempirical fields of inquiry such as philosophy, logic, and mathematics have not made substantial progress during the course of their history. Take, for example, our own field of study, philosophy. Michael Dummett laments the fact that philosophy, in all its long history, has failed to make progress in the sense in which science has, establishing "a generally accepted methodology, generally accepted criteria of success and, therefore, a body of definitively achieved results."[38] But even though philosophy does not progress in the way that science does, this need not imply

that philosophy fails to exhibit any progress at all. John Passmore, for instance, contends that "philosophy makes progress by seeing more clearly, in greater depth, what is involved in its controversies."[39] In a similar vein, J.J.C. Smart notes that "if we look at a copy of *Mind* or *The Journal of Philosophy* and compare it with one of a hundred, or fifty, or perhaps only twenty-five years ago, we may sense a general increase in technique, sophistication, and clarity."[40] And both Alston and Howard-Snyder argue that philosophy has been significantly improved by the many carefully drawn distinctions made by philosophers over the centuries: e.g., the distinctions between knowledge and true belief, concrete and abstract entities, particulars and universals.[41] Which of these developments represents genuine progress may be a contentious issue, but it does not seem plausible to hold that no progress of any sort can be found in philosophy. Similar remarks, no doubt, could be made about logic and mathematics.[42] Thus, Rowe's response to the progress argument, in assuming that a nonempirical discipline cannot make any advances, is less than satisfactory.

Rather than challenging Howard-Snyder's claim that it would not be surprising if there has been periodic progress in our discovery of values, one may object to his further claim that this sort of progress in the realm of value renders it very likely that there remain goods to be discovered. The objection, in other words, is that there is good reason to believe that, even if there has been a gradual evolution in our apprehension of value, it is likely that this evolutionary process ceased thousands of years of ago. This line of response, however, shares the same fate as Rowe's objection, as I will proceed to show.

On the face of it, the suggestion that our axiological evolution ceased long ago appears dubious, for despite the many atrocities committed over the last century, it is difficult to ignore the degree of moral progress achieved on a variety of fronts. Consider, for example, the following changes that have taken place in many western countries:

- Individuals are now free to adhere to the religious practices that seem right to them.
- Slavery has been abolished.
- The treatment of convicted criminals, the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, and other minority groups has substantially improved.
- Discrimination based on gender or race is forbidden.
- An increased sensitivity towards the environment and animals has emerged.
- A democratic and representative form of government is widely supported.

Arguably, all of the above signal a deepened and more enlightened moral consciousness than that which existed in, say, the Middle Ages. However, these moral improvements have not been brought about by the recognition or discovery of new values. The values embodied in the above developments – for example, freedom, love, compassion, justice – are not unique to contemporary western society, but have been acknowledged at least since the rise of the ancient Greek, Indian and Asian civilizations. Put differently, if we consider any property regarded as morally significant by at least some members of the human race, and we then group all these properties into a set *S*, it is plausible to hold that all members of *S* were known to our ancestors 2,000–3,000 years ago. This is not to deny that different cultures (or individuals) at different times have held widely divergent views as to what, if anything, counts as a good-making property. Nor is it to deny the plurality of perspectives on the nature of these properties and their application to specific issues or areas of practical concern (e.g., war, euthanasia, sex). The contention here, rather, is that those who accept that there may be something like good-making properties have not for a significant period of time discovered any new properties of this kind. Michael Tooley makes this point quite well:

> The moral progress that we seek as we look back over human history does not consist in the recognition of more good-making and bad-making properties, or right-making and wrong-making properties. It consists, rather, in a gradually increasing ability on the part of humans to respond appropriately to those properties *wherever* they occur.[43]

From this point of view, Wykstra's 'deep universe theory' encountered in the previous chapter is deeply flawed – the universe may have moral depth in that a thorough understanding of many goods can only be unearthed through extensive inquiry, but not in the sense that there are goods hidden from our view.[44] For the fact that we have had no breakthroughs involving the discovery of new intrinsic goods since ancient times creates a presumption that we have reached the end of the road – it is unlikely, in other words, that we will uncover any further goods.[45]

Howard-Snyder argues that this response entirely misses the point of the analogy between progress in the physical sciences and progress in axiology. The crucial feature of the analogy, he explains, is that "it is *periodic, gappy progress* that underlies the inference to ignorance."[46] The periodic discoveries in science of previously unknown aspects of the physical world suggest that there will be further progress of a similar sort, and future progress implies present ignorance. However, such periodic progress not only

implies present ignorance but also periods of 'drought' or gaps, perhaps millennia-long, in which nothing new is discovered. Thus, *if* the kind of sporadic progression in the realm of values as outlined in The Story has in fact occurred, then it is only to be expected that we would discover no goods for long stretches of time *even if there are many goods we are not aware of*. Therefore, one can make the inference from 'We have discovered no new intrinsic goods over the last few thousand years' to 'It is very likely that we have discovered all the goods there are' *only if* there was no such sporadic progress. That is to say, the above inference is a reasonable one to draw only if it is reasonable to hold that our ancestors discovered the goods we know of over a relatively short time in the history of our species. But, as Howard-Snyder points out, "why should we assume *that*?" He goes on to say:

> The fact of the matter is that neither Tooley nor anybody else has any reason at all to believe it. There is no reason to think that our ancestors' grasp of intrinsic goods must have come in such a tightly bound package that they could not have grasped one without grasping them all. (In this connection reflect on the development in a child's awareness and appreciation of different intrinsic goods.) Moreover, given the scant archeological and paleontological evidence we have, it would not be surprising at all if the sort of sporadic progression indicated [in The Story] occurred.[47]

By way of reply, one may grant that Howard-Snyder is correct about the origins of our knowledge of values, but remain unconvinced that this shows that there are (or that it would not be surprising if there are) intrinsic goods other than the ones we know of. For suppose we concede that the appearance of *Homo sapiens* on the stage of evolution some 300,000 years ago may well have triggered a lengthy and sporadic progression in the discernment of value which only tapered off a few thousand years ago. As Howard-Snyder observes,

> Such a sporadic progression in our discovery of intrinsic goods would not be surprising at all given that our species' ability even to conceive of them is rooted in structures in the human brain, structures which, for all we know, evolved sporadically over the course of tens of thousands of years. (It might help you to draw a time-line correlating distinct cerebral developments with distinct capacities to conceive of and appreciate different intrinsic goods.)[48]

According to Howard-Snyder, then, the sporadic evolution of the human brain over thousands of years indicates that our apprehension of value

may also have evolved along similar lines. This, however, raises the following problem overlooked by Howard-Snyder: we – that is, the species *Homo sapiens* – have ceased evolving, at least temporarily.[49] Several explanations have been given for this: for example, the development of culture – initially in the form of crude tools but now including sophisticated technologies – has intervened between our species and our natural environment in such a way that the environment cannot exert pressures on the human species in the way that it has in the past. Thus, it seems that we as a species have reached the terminus of our evolutionary journey. But if knowledge of values is tied to our evolutionary development, then the fact that further human evolutionary change is unlikely also renders it unlikely that we will make any further progress in our discovery of goods. Thus, the drought in axiology over the last few thousand years, far from indicating that a burst of knowledge in the realm of values is imminent, suggests that the limits in our cerebral capacity for recognizing value have been reached.

To be sure, this objection to the progress argument, even if valid, only shows that the discovery of further goods is very unlikely. It does not show that it is likely that the goods we know of are all the goods there are. To establish this further conclusion, a reason would need to be given for supposing that the goods likely to be discovered by us are representative of the goods there are. Thus, this counter-argument to the progress argument cannot be offered as an argument in support of RNA.[50]

But there is a deeper problem with this counter-argument. For we cannot rule out the possibility that future changes to our gene pool (perhaps brought about by a cataclysmic event such as a worldwide epidemic) may eventually lead to the development of a new subspecies, or even a new species altogether, with significantly better cognitive capacities enabling it to discern a greater range of intrinsic goods. One may then argue that, if a future species can discover new goods, it is (epistemically) possible that we do not know all the goods there are. To defeat this line of reasoning we would require a good reason for thinking it unlikely that our species will evolve in the relevant ways. The prospects of finding such a reason, at least within evolutionary biology, appear to be dim. There is, nevertheless, a different strategy that can be used to show that the progress argument is unacceptable, a strategy that applies equally well to the argument from complex goods.

Consider the following scenario: In 50 years time our world degenerates into a global death camp in which 99% of the population are bred for endless, excruciating torture inflicted by the remaining sadistic madmen. However, a few die-hard theists remain, and when an argument from evil

like Rowe's is suggested to them they inevitably reply:

> 'We admit that we are unable to see why God allows us to suffer like this. But given what we know about our evolutionary past, it's at least as likely as not that there has been the sort of periodic progress that suggests that there are goods beyond our ken. And nothing we believe rules out the possibility that these unknown goods actually obtain, or will obtain, and that if we fully grasped them, we would clearly see that they justify God's permission of all this horrific evil. Furthermore, this world of ours is clearly a very appalling one, and so it would take an immensely great good to justify God's permitting it – but then it would not be surprising if this good were very complex and therefore beyond our powers of comprehension.'[51]

This reply, however, is highly implausible. The evil in such a world is so horrible and profuse that no-one in their right mind would deny that the inscrutability of this evil renders belief in its pointlessness entirely justified. But if we follow the logic of the progress argument and the argument from complex goods till the very end, we cannot dismiss the above reply as absurd. These arguments, therefore, ought to be rejected.

William Rowe has, in fact, raised a similar objection:

> If human and animal life on earth were *nothing more than a series of agonizing moments from birth to death*, the position of my friends [Howard-Snyder and Bergmann] would still require them to say that we cannot reasonably infer that it is even likely that God does not exist. For, since we don't know that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are, we can't know that it is likely that there are no goods that justify God in permitting human and animal life on earth to be nothing more than a series of agonizing moments from birth to death. But surely such a view is unreasonable, if not absurd.[52]

This is reminiscent of Antony Flew's infamous parable involving two explorers who come across a clearing in a jungle.[53] The clearing contained many flowers but also many weeds. One explorer claimed that some gardener tends this plot, whereas the other explorer denied this. So they decided to put their respective claims to the test. They set up their tents and keep watch, but no gardener is seen. It is therefore suggested that the gardener is invisible. They set up an electrified barbed-wire fence and they patrol the area with bloodhounds. Still nothing. Nevertheless, the 'believer' is not convinced: "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to

electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." The 'sceptic', however, asks, "What then remains of your original assertion? How does this gardener of yours differ from an imaginary gardener or no gardener at all?" Flew, applying this parable to the case of religious belief, is prompted to put the following question to the theist:

> What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or the existence of, God?[54]

A similar situation arises with respect to the progress and complexity arguments offered by Howard-Snyder, for they lead to the view that, no matter what evils befall our world, these cannot be deemed pointless and thus could never constitute decisive evidence against theism – but this only throws Howard-Snyder back in the jungle with the obstinate explorer.

Howard-Snyder is not oblivious to this objection. His response to it, however, is somewhat surprising. He fails to see any absurdity in the reply given by the unfortunate victims of the torture camps. In his own words:

> The objector says this consequence [i.e., the 'sceptical theism' of the death camp victims] is absurd, that no right-minded person denies that the inscrutability of horrible and profuse suffering in a machiavellian world would justify belief in pointlessness. But some right-minded people do deny this, and I fail to feel the force of the bald appeal to absurdity. What I'd like to see is some argument that it is absurd.[55]

It is not clear, however, that an argument is required here, given the strong counterintuitive force of the position advocated by the death camp victims. Nevertheless, to avoid relying on intuition alone, it may be worth deferring to the response given by many theists to Flew's falsification challenge. In reply to Flew it was often pointed out that there are numerous circumstances which, had they obtained, would constitute compelling evidence against the existence of God. Colin Brown, for example, states that theism (or at least Christian theism) would be false if

> suffering never proved to be a blessing in disguise. It would be false if adversity was never a means of finding a deeper meaning in life. It would be false if people had no experience of God working out a higher purpose in life. It would be false if adversity never offered others the opportunity of service and self-giving. It would be false if God had consigned all men to condemnation and had not sent his Son to redeem them.[56]

For the same reasons, I think it is clear that theism would be false in the world of death camps portrayed earlier. In this world, the lives of nearly all people are rendered meaningless by the horrors they suffer, and so it would be entirely reasonable for anyone in such a world to wish that they had never been born. But it is difficult to imagine what could falsify the belief in a perfectly good God if not the actualization of such a 'hell on earth.' The conclusion to be drawn, then, is that the progress argument as well as the argument from complex goods fail as defeaters of RNA.

4   ALSTON'S ANALOGIES

I will end my examination of the case against RNA with a look at Alston's analogies. Alston provides a series of analogies that, in his opinion, highlight "the absurdity of the claim" that the fact that we cannot see what justifying reason an omniscient, omnipotent being might have for doing something provides strong support for the supposition that no such reason is available to that being.[57] Alston, however, chooses to steer clear of the parent-child analogies employed by Wykstra, for he concedes that these contain loopholes that can be exploited in the ways suggested by Rowe.

Alston's analogies fall into two groups, the first of which attempt to show that the insights attainable by finite, fallible human beings are not an adequate indication of what is available by way of reasons to an omniscient, omnipotent being. Suppose I am a first-year university physics student and I am faced with a theory of quantum phenomena, but I struggle to see why the author of the theory draws the conclusions she draws. Does that entitle me to suppose that she has no sufficient reason for her conclusions? Clearly not, for my inability to discern her reasons is only to be expected given my lack of expertise in the subject. Similarly, given my lack of training in painting, I fail to see why Picasso arranged the figures in *Guernica* as he did. But that does not entitle me to infer that he had no sufficient reason for doing so. Again, being a beginner in chess, I fail to see any reason why Kasparov made the move he did, but I would be foolish to conclude that he had no good reason to do so.

Alston applies the foregoing to the noseeum inference from 'We cannot see any sufficient reason for God to permit $E1$ and $E2$' to 'God has no sufficient reason to do so.' In this case, as in the above examples, we are in no position to draw such a conclusion for we lack any reason to suppose that we have a sufficient grasp of the range of possible reasons open to the other party. Our grasp of the reasons God might have for his actions is thus comparable to the grasp of the neophyte in the other cases. Indeed, Alston holds

that "the extent to which God can envisage reasons for permitting a given state of affairs exceeds our ability to do so by *at least as much* as Einstein's ability to discern the reason for a physical theory exceeds the ability of one ignorant of physics."[58]

Alston's second group of analogies seek to show that, in looking for the reasons God might have for certain acts or omissions, we are in effect trying to determine whether there is a so-and-so in a territory the extent and composition of which is largely unknown to us (or, at least, it is a territory such that we have no way of knowing the extent to which its constituents are unknown to us). Alston thus states that Rowe's noseeum inference

> is like going from 'We haven't found any signs of life elsewhere in the universe' to 'There isn't life elsewhere in the universe.' It is like someone who is culturally and geographically isolated going from 'As far as I have been able to tell, there is nothing on earth beyond this forest' to 'There is nothing on earth beyond this forest.' Or, to get a bit more sophisticated, it is like someone who reasons 'We are unable to discern anything beyond the temporal bounds of our universe,' where those bounds are the big bang and the final collapse, to 'There is nothing beyond the temporal bounds of our universe.'[59]

Just as we lack a map of the relevant 'territory' in these cases, we also lack a reliable internal map of the diversity of considerations that are available to an omniscient being in permitting instances of suffering. But given our ignorance of the extent, variety, or constitution of the *terra incognita*, it is surely the better part of wisdom to refrain from drawing any hasty conclusions regarding the nature of this territory.

Although such analogies may not be open to the same criticisms levelled against the analogies put forward by Wykstra, they are in the end no more successful than Wykstra's analogies. Beginning with Alston's first group of analogies, where a noseeum inference is unwarranted due to a lack of expertise, there is typically no expectation on the part of the neophyte that the reasons held by the other party (e.g., the physicist's reasons for drawing conclusion x, Kasparov's reasons for making move x in a chess game) would be discernible to her. If you have just begun to study physics, you would not expect to understand Einstein's reasons for advancing the special theory of relativity. However, if your five-year-old daughter suffered the fate of Sue as depicted in *E*2, would you not expect a perfectly loving being to reveal his reasons to you for allowing this to happen, or at least to comfort you by providing you with special assurances that that there is a reason why this terrible evil could not have been prevented?

Rowe makes this point quite well:

> Being finite beings we can't expect to know all the goods God would
> know, any more than an amateur at chess should expect to know all the
> reasons for a particular move that Kasparov makes in a game. But,
> unlike Kasparov who in a chess match has a good reason not to tell us
> how a particular move fits into his plan to win the game, God, if he
> exists, isn't playing chess with our lives. In fact, since understanding the
> goods for the sake of which he permits terrible evils to befall us would
> itself enable us to better bear our suffering, God has a strong reason to
> help us understand those goods and how they require his permission of
> the terrible evils that befall us.[60]

There appears, then, to be an obligation on the part of a perfect being to not
keep his intentions entirely hidden from us. Such an obligation, however,
does not attach to a gifted chess player or physicist – Kasparov cannot be
expected to reveal his game plan, while a physics professor cannot be
expected to make her mathematical demonstration in support of quantum
theory comprehensible to a high school physics student.[61]

Similarly with Alston's second set of analogies, where our inability to
map the territory within which to look for x is taken to preclude us from
inferring from our inability to find x that there is no x. This may be applic-
able to cases like the isolated tribesman's search for life outside his forest or
our search for extraterrestrial life, for in such scenarios there is no prior
expectation that the objects of our search are of such a nature that, if they
exist, they would make themselves manifest to us. However, in our search
for God's reasons we are toiling in a unique territory, one inhabited by a per-
fectly loving being who, as such, would be expected to make at least his
presence, if not also his reasons for permitting evil, (more) transparent to us.
This difference in prior expectations uncovers an important disanalogy
between the cases Alston considers and cases involving our attempt to dis-
cern God's intentions. Alston's analogies, therefore, not only fail to advance
the case against RNA but also suggest a line of thought in support of RNA.[62]

In the light of the foregoing discussion, we may conclude that the
attempt to show that we should suspend judgment regarding the truth or fal-
sity of RNA has not succeeded. More specifically, the complexity and
progress arguments advanced by Howard-Snyder reduce theism to an unfal-
sifiable hypothesis, while Durston's argument from the complexity of his-
tory relies on the dubious assumptions that we do not have what it takes to
pass judgements of overall moral worth or to conceive of worlds better than
ours. Finally, Alston's set of analogies display a similar lack of success in

providing us with some reason to be in doubt about whether it is likely that we would discern God's reasons for permitting horrendous evil, if such reasons there be. Indeed, as indicated earlier, from the ruins of Alston's case there emerges a line of argumentation that lends a degree of support to RNA. This brings us to the question of what grounds there might be for thinking it reasonable to accept RNA.

NOTES

¹   If Rowe's argument is construed as an argument from the *amount* of horrendous evil, then RNA would need to be altered accordingly: More likely than not we would detect a reason that would justify God in permitting so much horrendous evil rather than a lot less (or, rather than a little less), if there were such a reason (see Chapter 3, Section 1.3).

²   Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), p.10, emphasis his. Cf. Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion*, p. 92.

³   Howard-Snyder outlines his strategy in "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 299–300, "God, Evil, and Suffering," pp. 108–10, "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," pp. 242–44, and (with Michael Bergmann) "Grounds for Belief in God Aside," p. 144.

⁴   Peter van Inwagen makes a similar point when comparing the evidential argument from evil with arguments against the existence of extraterrestrial life based on the observed fact of 'cosmic silence' ("The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 156–59).

⁵   Howard-Snyder, "God, Evil, and Suffering," p.109.

⁶   Howard-Snyder, "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," p. 245, emphasis his. Howard-Snyder first put forward this argument in *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God* (PhD dissertation, Syracuse University, 1992), §26, p.152, and repeated it in "Theism, the Hypothesis of Indifference, and the Biological Role of Pain and Pleasure," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 464. The same argument is also advanced by Terry Christlieb ("Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of Evil?" pp. 54–55), who states that the argument was suggested by William Alston.

⁷   Howard-Snyder, "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," pp. 245–56.

⁸   A possible reply to the Complexity Argument is that God could have – and therefore should have – created us with a greater degree of intelligence so that the goods that figure in God's purposes, no matter how complex they may be, would always be within our ken. For a defence of this line of thought, see Mundia, "Evil, Finitude, and Protest I: A Qualified RSVP," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 51 (2002): 139–58. It might be the case, however, that it takes nothing less than omniscience to understand God's purposes for permitting evil, or some types of evil. And even if it were possible for God to create a world populated by omniscient beings, the sceptical theist may simply retort that God has good reasons for not creating such a world and his reasons are beyond our ken.

⁹   Durston, "The Consequential Complexity of History and Gratuitous Evil," *Religious Studies* 36 (2000): 65.

¹⁰   *Ibid*., pp. 66–67.

¹¹   *Ibid*., p. 66.

¹²   *Ibid*.

13   The summary of Durston's views that follows draws on pp. 67–73 of Durston's "The Consequential Complexity of History."

14   This clearly shows that Durston accepts (without argument) a consequentialist reading of 'gratuitous evil.' However, many advocates of the evidential argument define 'gratuitous evil' in a way that is neutral with respect to the truth of consequentialism – see, for example, Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 336, fn. 3, and Russell, "The Persistent Problem of Evil," p. 129. Even if, as Eric Reitan has argued, Rowe and Russell inadvertently propose a notion of 'gratuitous evil' that is committed to consequentialism, there is no need to (and perhaps good reason not to) conceive of gratuitous evil in this manner (see Reitan, "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" *Faith and Philosophy* 17 (2000): 306–19). Indeed, a non-consequentialist conception of gratuitous evil would avoid the objections raised by Durston against evidential arguments from evil.

15   I should mention that Durston begins his paper by taking for granted three assumptions drawn in large part from the work of Plantinga: (a) incompatibilism with respect to free will; (b) the view that there might be some restrictions on how much evil God can prevent in the course of achieving a greater good; and (c) the view that there may be worlds containing moral good that God cannot actualize, since the actualization of such worlds is partly dependent on the free decisions of its inhabitants and not solely on God ("The Consequential Complexity of History," pp. 67–68). The first and third of these assumptions lie behind Durston's argument above that we do not know whether God can actualize a better world. Despite my reservations regarding these assumptions, my critique of Durston will be made independently of their truth.

16   It may be pointed out, however, that later in his paper Durston revises this definition so as to allow evils to be classified as gratuitous if there is no compensation in this or the next life to those affected by the evil. The rationale for this amendment is the wish to avoid the "heartless" view that God may be justified in permitting *E*2 solely for the sake of consequences – such as the prevention over the following three centuries of eight similar cases – that are not concerned with goods bestowed upon the individual experiencing *E*2. See pp. 75–76 of Durston's "The Consequential Complexity of History."

17   A further objection against Durston's scepticism regarding our ability to determine the values of *A* and *B* is suggested by James Keller ("The Problem of Evil and the Attributes of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 26 (1989): 161), who emphasizes the relevance of determinism to this issue. In holding that God permits *E* for the sake of some good linked to *E* by a long, complex causal chain, one is assuming that causal laws are strictly deterministic. This, however, is inconsistent with Durston's commitment to incompatibilism (see fn. 15 above). On the other hand, if the deterministic view of causation is mistaken, then complex causal chains cannot be part of God's reasons for permitting *E*. But then we need not look to all the consequences of *E* till the end of history in order to arrive at the value of *A*.

18   Rowe, "Evil and God's Freedom in Creation," p. 104.

19   Durston, "The Consequential Complexity of History," p. 70.

20   *Ibid.*, p. 71.

21   *Ibid.*

22   *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

23   *Ibid.*, p. 71.

24   Durston has recently responded to my critique of his sceptical theism, and I have in turn replied to his response. This exchange is due to appear in a forthcoming issue of *Religious Studies*.

25   Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil," pp. 44–45.

[26]   *Ibid.*, p. 45.

[27]   *Ibid.*

[28]   Howard-Snyder presents 'The Story' in *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §17, pp.100–103, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 296–97, and "God, Evil, and Suffering," pp. 106–107.

[29]   Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §17, p. 102.

[30]   Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 297.

[31]   *Ibid.*

[32]   Howard-Snyder's defence of the progress argument occurs in *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §26, p. 151; "Theism, the Hypothesis of Indifference, and the Biological Role of Pain and Pleasure," p. 464; "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 301; "God, Evil, and Suffering," p.111; "Rowe's Argument from Particular Horrors," pp. 244–45; and (with Michael Bergmann) "Grounds for Belief in God Aside," p. 147.

[33]   See Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §26, p. 151.

[34]   Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 301.

[35]   Rowe, "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," p. 92.

[36]   *Ibid.*, emphasis his.

[37]   However, in some quarters of philosophy of science, influenced by the views of Feyerabend, Kuhn and others, even the notion of progress within science has been thrown into doubt.

[38]   Michael Dummett, "Can Analytical Philosophy be Systematic, and Ought it to Be?" in *Truth and Other Enigmas* (London: Duckworth, 1978), p. 455.

[39]   John Passmore, "The End of Philosophy?" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1996): 7.

[40]   J.J.C. Smart, "Why Philosophers Disagree," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* suppl. vol. 19 (1993): 82.

[41]   See Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil," pp. 44–45, and Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §27, p.154. Other ways in which philosophy can be said to progress are outlined in William Gerber, "Is There Progress in Philosophy?" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 34 (1973): 669–73, and Todd C. Moody, "Progress in Philosophy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23 (1986): 35–46.

[42]   A case in point is the great leap forward from Aristotelian logic made at the turn of the last century by Frege – see Dag Prawitz, "Progress in Philosophy," in Arnold Burgen *et al.*, *The Idea of Progress* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), pp.139–53.

[43]   Tooley, "The Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 115, emphasis his. A similar view is advocated by Michele Moody-Adams, "The Idea of Moral Progress," *Metaphilosophy* 30 (1999): 168–85, esp. p.182.

[44]   See Chapter 5, Section 6.4 as well as Richard Gale's critique of Wykstra's 'deep universe theory' in "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," pp. 209–10.

[45]   Tooley points to another consideration showing that the discovery of further goods is unlikely: viz., the fact that of the vast array of properties with which the human race has become acquainted, only a very small proportion have turned out to possess intrinsic moral significance. Thus, the discovery of intrinsic goods is an extremely rare occurrence and is unlikely to be repeated (see Tooley, "The Argument from Evil," pp.114–15). However, Howard-Snyder – drawing mainly on Michael Stocker's *Plural and Conflicting Values* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, esp. ch. 6, pp. 165–207) – objects that Tooley implausibly assumes that "intrinsic goods come in rather 'thick' conceptual slices, so that they are countable and very few have been discovered in a very long time" ("The Argument from Evil," p. 296; a more elaborate exposition of this objection

occurs in Howard-Snyder's *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §17, pp. 99–100). I will not take up this issue in any detail here, except to say that even if intrinsic goods are individuated in the way suggested by Howard-Snyder, it may still be the case that good-making properties *as a proportion of all the properties we know of* are few and far between.

⁴⁶   Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §27, p. 154, emphasis his.

⁴⁷   Howard-Snyder, "God, Evil, and Suffering," p.107.

⁴⁸   *Ibid*., p.106.

⁴⁹   This claim, as it stands, is likely to be treated with a degree of scepticism, and perhaps rightly so, given the long stretches of time involved in the evolutionary process. Nevertheless, it seems safe to say that there is little evidence that the human species has, at least within the last 200,000 years, been evolving in a way that is likely to lead to the formation of a new species or subspecies. The factors contributing to our species' arrested evolution are detailed in: Steve Jones, "The Evolutionary Future of Humankind," in Steve Jones *et al.* (eds), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 439–45; Michael H. Day, "Human Evolution," in *The New Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th edition, vol.18 (Chicago, IL: Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 1995), p. 808; Ian Tattersall, *Becoming Human: Evolution and Human Uniqueness* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1998), p. 238–39; and Douglas J. Futuyma, *Evolutionary Biology*, 3rd ed. (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 1998), pp. 739–40.

⁵⁰   I owe this clarification to Michael Bergmann, who correctly notes that the considerations advanced by Tooley with respect to our prospects for discovering new goods, if interpreted as an argument that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are, would be "quite underwhelming" ("Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," *Noûs* 35 (2001): 288).

⁵¹   This scenario is presented by Howard-Snyder in *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §27, p. 162; and, in a slightly different context, in "Seeing through CORNEA," p. 27.

⁵²   Rowe, "Reply to Howard-Snyder and Bergmann," in Rowe (ed.), *God and the Problem of Evil*, pp.156–57, emphasis his. This objection is repeated in Rowe's "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," *Noûs* 35 (2001): 298, and is also defended by Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998), pp. 206–207.

⁵³   See Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in Flew and Macintyre (eds), *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, pp. 96–99.

⁵⁴   *Ibid*., p. 99.

⁵⁵   Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §27, p.163. For a different, but equally implausible, response to the kind of objection I am raising, see Garth Hallett, *A Middle Way to God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.102–103.

⁵⁶   Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968), p.178. Cf. William Wainwright, "The Presence of Evil and the Falsification of Theistic Assertions," *Religious Studies* 4 (1969): 215. Interestingly, Howard-Snyder himself has argued elsewhere against the claim that evil under no circumstances counts against theism – see Howard-Snyder and O'Leary-Hawthorne, "On the A Priori Rejection of Evidential Arguments from Evil," *Sophia* 33 (1994): 33–47.

⁵⁷   Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 317. Howard-Snyder and Bergmann endorse Alston's analogies in "Grounds for Belief in God Aside," pp. 146–47.

58   Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 318, emphasis his.

59   *Ibid.*

60   Rowe, "Reply to Howard-Snyder and Bergmann," p. 157.

61   This is not to deny that God cannot be expected to divulge his reasons for permitting evil when these are characterized by a complexity greater than we can handle. The appeal to complexity, however, faces the problems identified in Sections 1 and 2 above.

62   This line of thought is developed further in Section 2 of Chapter 8 in relation to the problem of divine hiddenness.

7.   IN SUPPORT OF THE INFERENCE FROM INSCRUTABLE TO POINTLESS EVIL

In the last two chapters, a variety of arguments against Rowe's 'noseeum' inference from inscrutable evil to pointless evil were considered. But even if, as I have argued, none of these arguments succeed, on some interpretations of CORNEA (including that of its author, Stephen Wykstra), there remains a 'burden of reasonability' on Rowe to provide some reason for thinking that his noseeum inference and its underlying noseeum assumption are most likely true (see Chapter 5, Section 3). In this chapter, therefore, I turn to some arguments that have been offered in support of Rowe's Noseeum Assumption (or RNA), the assumption that if there were God-justifying goods served by evils such as $E1$ and $E2$, it is likely that we would be cognizant of these goods. Such arguments are somewhat hard to come by, as it is often assumed by theists and non-theists alike that RNA is highly implausible. But the recent rise of sceptical theism has led to a detailed examination of RNA, and here I will look at two lines of thought that have emerged in its support.

1   THE ARGUMENT FROM MORAL SCEPTICISM

A common criticism of sceptical theism is that its scepticism runs too deep. The objection, more precisely, is that scepticism about RNA or about our knowledge of what goods there are leads to excessive and unreasonable scepticism in other areas. Bruce Russell, for example, argues that the view that there are reasons beyond our ken that would justify God in allowing suffering which appears pointless is in the same epistemic boat as the view that there is a God who created the universe 100 years ago and, for reasons beyond our ken, has deceived us into thinking it is older.[1] Richard Gale, likewise, points

out that by claiming we are in no position to justifiably assert that there are no goods beyond our ken, we open the floodgates to a radical form of scepticism according to which we are in no position to justifiably assert that, say, there is no lion in this room because, for all we know, there is an evil demon making it seem to us that there is no lion when in fact there is one.[2] A similar line of thought, but perhaps more difficult to contend with, presents sceptical theism as being committed to an objectionable form of moral scepticism. This argument, as developed by Bruce Russell and more recently by Michael Almeida and Graham Oppy[3], runs as follows:

Suppose we concede to the sceptical theist that it is not unlikely that there are goods beyond our ken which justify God in not preventing $E1$. Suppose also there is a witness to $E1$ (following received tradition, call him 'Stan') who could intervene to stop $E1$ at no personal cost, but fails to do so. What was previously conceded is that it is not unlikely that there is some good which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we could recognize as a morally sufficient reason for God not intervening to stop $E1$. But then – by parity of reason – we must also concede that it is not unlikely that there is some good which, if we were smarter and better equipped, we could recognize as a reason for Stan's failure to intervene to stop $E1$. Put differently, if it is not unlikely that there are unknown goods that would be foregone if God were to prevent $E1$, it is also not unlikely that there are unknown goods that would be foregone if Stan were to prevent $E1$. We should conclude, therefore, that it is best, all things considered, that Stan does not intervene. But surely it is implausible to think of Stan as being morally justified in not intervening. Thus, sceptical theism, insofar as it leads to the unpalatable view that we cannot judge Stan's inaction to be wrong, ought to be rejected. The conclusion to be drawn is that if there are goods justifying God in not preventing $E1$, it is unlikely that these goods would be beyond our ken. In short, RNA is true.

Objection 1 – Two objections to the above argument will be considered, the first of which focuses on the premise that if *there is a reason beyond our ken that justifies God in not intervening, then that same reason would justify Stan in not intervening*. Alston has protested that

This badly misconstrues moral justification. Whether I am morally justified in doing something is not a function of whether there are objective facts that could be used by *someone* as a morally good reason for doing it. It is rather a function of whether *I* have such a morally good reason for doing it.[4]

Alston's point has a good deal of force, for suppose that God has some reason outside our ken that justifies his failure to intervene. Stan, like all of us, would

not be able to discern what that reason might be. Thus, the reason motivating God's inaction cannot be the same reason motivating Stan's inaction. But if God's reason is not what motivates Stan, then that reason cannot justify Stan in not intervening.

Russell, however, is not unaware of this line of response. He agrees that Stan will not be able to offer the same reason why God did not intervene as a defence of his (Stan's) own inaction, as this reason will not be what motivated him (Stan) to refrain from intervening. But Russell urges us to distinguish (a) the evaluation of the person and his motives, from (b) the evaluation of an act or omission. For example, if I were to give money to a charity merely in order to reduce my tax bill, this would be considered morally wrong according to (a), but on (b) it is morally permissible, for the act itself is a good one or has good consequences, irrespective of my motives. Russell thus wants to evaluate actions, not persons or their motives.[5]

Following Bergmann, Russell may be understood to be arguing as follows:[6] Suppose that the following is true:

A: There is some good G such that (a) G outweighs the evil permitted by Stan's inaction, (b) the permission of that evil is necessary for the obtaining of G, and (c) were G appropriately to motivate Stan's inaction, his inaction would be justified.

But if A is the case, then there is some justifying reason for Stan's inaction, even if Stan himself or his motives should be evaluated negatively due to the fact that his inaction was not informed or motivated by this (or any other) justifying reason. The sceptical theist, however, claims that we are unable to tell whether there is in fact a good such as that specified in A. In other words, we are in the dark as to whether there is a morally adequate motivation for divine inaction, and so we should remain agnostic about whether divine inaction is unjustified. The problem here, as Russell puts it, is that "moral skepticism about God's omissions entails moral skepticism about our own omissions."[7] In other words, agnosticism with respect to A leads to agnosticism regarding B:

B: Stan's inaction is wrong.

Agnosticism about B, however, is clearly unreasonable and excessive, and so sceptical theism ought to be rejected.

However, as suggested by Alston's criticism noted earlier, *agnosticism about A does not necessarily lead to agnosticism about B*. It is plausible to hold an agnostic position regarding the truth of A while at the same time accepting B as true. For even if we have no idea as to whether or not A is

true, as long as we know that Stan's motivation in permitting $E1$ is morally inadequate, that would provide us with sufficient grounds for taking his inaction to be wrong and thus for holding B to be true.[8] Furthermore, it would be of little help to the proponent of the argument from moral scepticism to insist that agnosticism over A, even if it does not lead to agnosticism over B, leads to agnosticism regarding C:

> C: There exists no (known or unknown) justifying reason for Stan's inaction.

For if a 'justifying reason' is something akin to G in A above then, as Bergmann points out, agnosticism regarding C, unlike agnosticism about B, is not unreasonable. Indeed, the sceptical theist would regard doubt over the truth of C to be the only rational option given our ignorance with respect to the realm of value and God-justifying goods.[9]

Objection 2 – It may be thought, however, that the line of response expressed in Objection 1 entirely misses the point of the argument from moral scepticism. For we can agree that the reason justifying God's inaction need not be the same reason justifying Stan's inaction. As indicated above, if God's reason is beyond our ken it cannot function as a motivating and thus as a justifying factor for Stan's inaction. Moreover, given the differences between the agents involved, it is unlikely that the same unknown goods would be secured by the inaction of the respective agents.[10] Nevertheless, it remains the case that *if there are compelling grounds for thinking it not unlikely that there are unknown goods secured by God's failure to prevent E1, then the same grounds would compel us to hold that it is not unlikely that there are unknown goods secured by Stan's failure to prevent E1*. This, however, need not involve any commitment to the claim that the unknown goods are the same in the divine and human cases. But even if this italicized conditional statement were true, why should that lead us to think (contrary to our ordinary moral practice) that it is morally wrong for Stan to intervene? In other words, why hold that our ordinary moral practice is undermined by the refusal to assign any probability value to statements such as 'There are unknown goods secured by Stan's failure to prevent $E1$'? Here I wish to concentrate on a response to this question suggested by Almeida and Oppy.

According to Almeida and Oppy, the sceptical theist's refusal to make any positive judgments about likelihoods puts her in the invidious position of being unable to make any rational moral decisions whatsoever. They support this by appealing to cases such as the following:

Suppose I am deciding whether to have Weetbix for breakfast. It is possible that if I choose to have Weetbix, this will set in motion a series of

events ultimately leading to the victory of the Liberal Party at the next fed-
eral election, a dreadful result that I would dearly wish to avoid. Normally,
we would ignore this possibility for we would think of it as being highly
improbable. Suppose, however, that I am sceptical about my entitlement to
make probability judgments of this kind, and so I am not prepared to assign
any probability (whether it be low, high, or middling) to the proposition *My
having Weetbix this morning will result in the re-election of the Liberals*. In
that case, I could not choose in any rational way to have Weetbix or to not
have Weetbix. I could, of course, choose on the basis of a toss of a coin, but
that would be an arbitrary choice rather than a choice informed by what I
believe or have reason to believe.

Similar things can be said about Stan. While fighting a bushfire, he notices
a hapless fawn that is destined to be engulfed by the fire unless he inter-
venes to rescue it. Suppose he stops for a moment to think about whether he
should intervene. Suppose further that he recognizes the possibility that
cases of animal suffering such as $E1$ may well serve outweighing goods that
lie beyond our ken. Being a sceptical theist, however, Stan holds that he is
not entitled to make any probability judgments regarding the aforemen-
tioned possibility. That is to say, he is not prepared to assign even negligible
probability to the proposition *My intervening to stop the fawn's suffering
will result in the loss of some unknown goods*. But in that case, he cannot
rationally choose to intervene, nor can he rationally choose to not intervene –
if he stands aside and watches the fawn die a miserable death he is not open
to any criticism, while if he decides to intervene he is not deserving of
any praise. By his lights, he has no reason to prefer intervening to not inter-
vening, or vice versa. The sceptical theist is therefore in no position to judge
Stan's failure to intervene as being morally wrong and thus to take B to
be true.[11]

In response, a sceptical theist may contend that it is simply not true that,
unless Stan assigns a low probability to *My intervening to stop the fawn's
suffering will result in the loss of some unknown goods*, he would have no
rational basis for intervening. For if Stan can disregard the possibility
expressed in this proposition by assigning it a negligible probability, per-
haps he can also disregard it by assigning it no probability at all. Similarly,
if I am agnostic regarding the long-term consequences of my having
Weetbix, then these consequences need not compel me to inaction. This,
however, is not an adequate response to the considerations advanced by
Almeida and Oppy. Both Stan and the Weetbix-eater cannot assign a low
probability to the claim that they have missed some relevant considerations,
and so they cannot hold that their deliberations have resulted in a clear
verdict. They are, in other words, 'out of their depth' and insofar as they

acknowledge this they cannot continue to act with confidence. But the suggestion that we are always 'out of our depth' when we choose to intervene to prevent, say, the suffering of the fawn or the rape, torture and murder of a young girl is hardly less appalling than the suggestion that we ought not to intervene.

Another way of understanding Almeida and Oppy here is to notice that, if we were to intervene to prevent the fawn or the young girl from suffering horribly, our decision would normally reflect a pattern of moral reasoning that would run something like this:

(1) There is a *pro tanto* reason for me to intervene to prevent evil *E*. [premise]

(2) I have found no *pro tanto* reason for me not to intervene to prevent *E*. [premise]

(3) (Therefore) There is no *pro tanto* reason for me not to intervene to prevent *E*. [from 2]

(4) (Therefore) I have an all-things-considered reason to intervene to prevent *E*. [from 1 & 3]

The point here is that the move from *pro tanto* reasons to all-things-considered reasons always relies on a noseeum inference of the same kind that appears in Rowe's evidential argument from evil. The sceptical theist, however, rejects the noseeum inference not only in Rowe's evidential argument, but also in the above reconstruction of our moral reasoning. The sceptical theist, in other words, claims that, even though we can find no reason for not intervening, there may well be some reason beyond our ken for not intervening, and so the noseeum inference from (2) to (3) is not a valid one. If that is the case, however, we will always be devoid of all-things-considered reasons when deliberating what to do – we will always be 'out of our depth'. Our ability to engage in ordinary forms of moral reasoning would therefore be undermined.[12]

This poses, I think, a considerable challenge to sceptical theism. This challenge, however, can be met. But before showing how this may be done, it may be helpful to recast Almeida and Oppy's argument along the following lines:

(5) We are morally obliged to increase the amount of good (or improve the balance of good over evil) in the world whenever we have the opportunity to do so. [premise]

(6) For all we know, any evil event *E* that takes place is necessary for the realization of some greater good beyond our ken, *G*. [premise]

(7) (Therefore) For all we know, if I were to prevent E from taking place, G would be lost and thus I would have failed to increase the good in the world despite having an opportunity to do so.[13] [from 6]

(8) (Therefore) I am morally obliged to not work to prevent E.[14] [from 5 & 7]

Premise (5) would, I assume, be common ground amongst sceptical theists and their opponents. The following premise, (6), represents a central plank in the sceptical theist credo, for according to this variety of theism we are in no position to assign a probability value to the proposition 'There exists no unknown God-justifying good for E'. But this is merely another way of saying 'For all we know, any evil event E that takes place is necessary for the realization of some greater good beyond our ken, G'.[15] From premise (6), however, it follows that, for all we know, our intervention to prevent E would result in the loss of some unknown greater good. But then, as Almeida and Oppy point out, the only rational course of action would be to not intervene – hence the conclusion (8).

It must be admitted, however, that the above argument does not parallel exactly the argument developed by Almeida and Oppy. Oppy has, in fact, pointed out that he never intended to argue that, given sceptical theist assumptions, someone who encountered the rape of a young child in progress would have a duty not to interfere. Rather, he only intended to defend the view that, given sceptical theist assumptions, there can be no 'reasoning' to decisions about what to do, since such decisions always involve noseeum inferences that are unacceptable to the sceptical theist.[16] But even if Almeida and Oppy do not argue that the sceptical theist is committed to the position [as expressed in (8)] that we have an obligation or duty to not interfere, they do argue in support of something quite similar. For in their view, it follows from premises (5)–(7) that

(8′) I cannot choose to intervene to prevent E in such a way that my choice would be a rationally informed or justified one.

This proposition captures Almeida and Oppy's claim that, by rejecting the noseeum inferences embedded in our ordinary moral reasoning, the sceptical theist is unable to 'reason' to a conclusion about what to do. The moral choices made by such a theist would not be rationally informed ones, but would be similar to choices made on the basis of a toss of a coin. But then we may reason further that

(9) If a decision to perform action x cannot be rationally justified, then we can have no duty to perform action x.

   (10) (Therefore) We can have no duty to intervene to prevent *E*.
   (11) If we have no duty to do *x*, then we are morally permitted to not do *x*.
   (12) (Therefore) We are morally permitted to not intervene to prevent *E*.

Almeida and Oppy, of course, do not explicitly subscribe to (9)–(12). Nevertheless, I cannot see how they could avoid any commitment to these consequences of (8′).

   Having recast Almeida and Oppy's argument in this way, we can begin to see wherein lies its weakness. Consider, first of all, the inference from (6) to (7). It is sometimes argued by theists that if God were to intervene in one case – such as *E*2 – involving the egregious abuse of free will, then he would be obliged to intervene in all similar cases, thus resulting in the removal of significant free will altogether. This line of thought will be examined more closely in Chapter 10 when looking at theodicies for moral evil, but assume for the present that it is a 'live possibility' – that is to say, there is no good reason for thinking that it is not the case. Now, the important point to note is that, even if God's reasons for permitting some actual evil are beyond our ken, if his reasons are in fact anything like those identified by the foregoing free will theodicy, then all that can be inferred from

   (6) For all we know, any evil event *E* that takes place is necessary for the realization of some greater good beyond our ken, *G*

is that

   (7a) For all we know, if *God* had prevented *E* from taking place, *G* would be lost.

But it does not follow from (6) that

   (7b) For all we know, if *I* had prevented *E* from taking place, *G* would be lost.

(7a) follows from (6) because, for all we know, God's intervention in one instance of suffering would necessitate a similar intervention in all instances, thereby removing the possibility of the actualization of any greater goods (e.g., free will, soul-making). But (7b) does not follow from (6), because my intervention to prevent, say, *E*2 cannot confer on me the obligation to prevent all like cases (for only an omnipotent being could fulfill such an obligation). If this is correct, then clearly the move from (7) to (8) would be blocked.[17]

   Almeida and Oppy, however, might argue that that the sceptical theist position, properly understood, runs as follows:

   (13) Our knowledge of goods and evils, as well as the interconnections between them, is very limited.

(14) (Therefore) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify God in permitting E.

(15) (Therefore) For all we know, if God had prevented E, G would be lost.

But if (13) is accepted, a parallel argument can be developed along the following lines:

(13) Our knowledge of goods and evils, as well as the interconnections between them, is very limited.

(16) (Therefore) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify *me* in permitting E.

(17) (Therefore) For all we know, if I had prevented E, G would be lost.

The sceptical theist, then, is faced with the following challenge:

How can your grounds for accepting (15) not be used as grounds for accepting (17)? In other words, can it be shown that one who accepts the argument encapsulated in (13)–(15) need not be committed to the parallel argument summarized in (13), (16) and (17)?

To avoid the descent into moral scepticism, perhaps the most promising strategy available to the sceptical theist is to moderate her scepticism. In particular, sceptical theism need not be construed (although it often is construed) as the sweeping thesis that our knowledge with respect to the realm of value (e.g., our grasp of the range of goods and evils, and the interconnections between them) is severely limited. Instead, the sceptical theist need only hold that it is *God's* purposes or intentions that often elude us. That is to say, our knowledge or understanding of *God-justifying goods* falls miserably short, even though our grasp of *goods in general* is quite adequate. But then the conclusion Almeida and Oppy wish to draw from sceptical theism does not follow. To see this, consider the following reconstruction of their argument in relation to the moderate version of sceptical theism that I have just outlined:

(18) Our knowledge of God's purposes is very limited.

From this, it can be inferred that

(14) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify *God* in permitting E.

But, clearly, it does not follow from (18) that

(16) For all we know, there are goods beyond our ken G which justify *me* in permitting E.[18]

The inference from (18) to (16) will be warranted if we presuppose a broad form of sceptical theism like that expressed by (13). Sceptical theists, however, need not make any such presuppositions.[19]

According to my diagnosis, then, the problem with the Almeida/Oppy critique is that it is based on the following assumption:

> If considerations about our cognitive limitations provide us with grounds to think that, for all we know, there are unknown goods justifying God's permission of *E*, then such considerations will also constitute grounds for thinking that, for all we know, there are unknown goods justifying our permission of *E*.

But this assumption is false. To see this, suppose that the relevant considerations about our cognitive limitations are narrow in scope, so that they only concern our epistemic access to God-justifying goods (as in (18)). As I have just indicated, the above assumption, when read in this way, clearly ought to be rejected.

The Almeida/Oppy critique, however, targets only that form of sceptical theism that is based on considerations about our access to goods and evils in general. Almeida and Oppy, therefore, are committed to the above assumption only if the relevant considerations about our cognitive limitations are given a broad scope, so that they relate to our epistemic access to goods and evils in general [as in (13)]. But even if the above assumption, construed in this way, were acceptable, it would merely show that Almeida and Oppy have singled out for criticism a broad variety of sceptical theism while neglecting other and perhaps more robust forms of sceptical theism. In any case, the above assumption is not acceptable even when construed in the way suggested by Almeida and Oppy. At least two lines of thought indicate that this is so.

(I) There cannot, as a matter of principle, be any unknown goods justifying our actions (or omissions). For it is necessarily true that if some good is not known by us, then it cannot play any role in the moral justification of our behaviour. Assume, for example, that there is some good that would morally justify you in breaking into your neighbour's house – let's say that your neighbour has just suffered a heart attack and if you break into his house you may prevent him from dying. The good in question may be described as '(Having a reasonable chance of) saving your neighbour's life'. Assume further that you have no epistemic access to this good, for you do not know that there is a good reason for breaking into your neighbour's house. Since this good is not known to you, you cannot recognize it and endorse it as a reason for breaking into your neighbour's house. But you are morally justified in

doing A for reason R only if R is a reason you endorse as a morally good rea-
son for doing A. Therefore, the good of saving your neighbour's life, by dint
of being unknown to you, cannot morally justify you in breaking into your
neighbour's house – indeed, it cannot provide moral justification for any-
thing you do. More generally, any goods lying beyond our ken are incapable
of justifying (in a moral sense) our behaviour.[20]

(II) Richard Swinburne has stated that, "God as the author of our being
would have rights over us which we do not have over our fellow men."[21]
Parents, for example, have certain rights over their children which strangers
do not (e.g., the right to insist that their children go to bed early), and these
rights arise from the parents being (to some extent) the source of their chil-
dren's existence as well as their role as benefactor and provider for their
children. Similarly, God – in virtue of his role as our creator and benefactor –
may have the right to allow us to endure abuse and murder, whereas we do
not have those sorts of rights over each other.

Almeida and Oppy are not unaware of this line of thought, but they note
that "the fact that there are differences between us and a perfect being with
respect to goods of which we have knowledge is completely beside the
point."[22] For according to Almeida and Oppy, the kinds of considerations
that lead sceptical theists to think it not unlikely that unknown goods are
secured by a perfect being's failure to prevent E must also lead us to think it
not unlikely that unknown goods are secured by our failure to prevent E –
irrespective of any differences there may be between a perfect being and a
human being in virtue of their disparate roles.

However, this is far from obvious. If, as Swinburne has suggested, God
may have rights over us that we do not have over each other, then there will
be situations where we have good reason to think that (a) God may be
morally justified – in virtue of occupying role R – in permitting evil E, but
(b) we cannot be morally justified – in virtue of not occupying role R – in
permitting E. In other words, there are evils such that no person S can be
morally justified in permitting them unless S occupies role R (the evils in
question will most likely be particularly bad ones such as rape and murder).
So, even if – for all we know – there are morally good reasons beyond our
ken for permitting, say, rape, such reasons cannot justify us in permitting
rape since we do not occupy the requisite role (i.e., the role of benevolent
creator and sustainer of the universe). But then Almeida and Oppy are wrong
in claiming that the kinds of considerations offered by sceptical theists as
grounds for thinking that there is some unknown good justifying God's per-
mission of E would also constitute grounds for thinking that there is some
unknown good justifying our permission of E. For what this claim overlooks

is that one must occupy the right kind of role before any goods – known or unknown – can provide any moral justification to one's behaviour.[23]

I conclude therefore that, in the light of both Objections 1 and 2, the argument from moral scepticism fails to provide any support to RNA.

2   ROWE'S CASE IN SUPPORT OF RNA

Rowe has put forward two arguments in defence of RNA. According to one of these arguments, the inference from P to Q (and, by extension, the proposition expressed by RNA) is justified in the same way any other induction by simple enumeration is justified. That is to say, the inference from P to Q is justified in virtue of being an instance of our common practice of making inferences from the known to the unknown – for example, if we have observed many A's and found them all to be B's, we have some reason to believe that the A's we have yet to observe will likely be B's as well.[24] This argument has come under a great deal of fire, with the general line of criticism being that Rowe has illegitimately assumed that the sample of goods referred to by P is representative of all goods.[25] Indeed, Rowe himself has come to acknowledge the force of this objection and has therefore abandoned this argument.[26] However, Rowe's rejection of this argument may have been premature, particularly since the second argument he has offered in support of RNA gives us a better reason for thinking that the goods we know of are representative of the goods there are. It is to this second argument that I now turn.

Rowe presents this argument as follows:

Unless we are excessively utilitarian, it is reasonable to believe that the goods for the sake of which O [i.e., the theistic God] permits much intense human suffering are goods that either are or include good experiences of the humans that endure the suffering. I say this because we normally would not regard someone as morally justified in permitting intense, involuntary suffering on the part of another, if that other were not to figure significantly in the good for which that suffering was necessary. We have reason to believe, then, that the goods for the sake of which much human suffering is permitted will include conscious experiences of these humans, conscious experiences that are themselves good. Now the conscious experiences of others are among the sorts of things we do know. And we do know the beings who undergo the suffering. So if such goods do occur we are likely to know them.[27]

In schematic form, Rowe's argument may be represented in the following manner:

(19) It is morally wrong for someone to allow another person *S* to undergo intense, involuntary, and underserved suffering unless *S* figures significantly in the good for which that suffering was necessary.

(20) (Therefore) The goods for the sake of which God permits (intense, involuntary, and underserved) human suffering must be goods that either are or include conscious experiences of the humans that endure the suffering.

(21) Among the things we know are (a) the conscious experiences of others, and (b) the people who undergo suffering.

(22) (Therefore) If there are goods for the sake of which God permits human suffering, it is likely that we would be cognizant of these goods.

Premise (19) – Beginning with premise (19), this expresses a general moral principle which may be stated with a little more precision as follows:

> It is morally permissible for an agent *A* to allow a person *S* to undergo intense, involuntary and underserved suffering *only if* the good secured by *S*'s suffering (or one of the goods secured by that suffering) is shared by *S* in a conscious way.

Call this *the sufferer-centred requirement*, or SCR for short. Perhaps the most memorable expression of this principle, or a variation of it, occurs in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, where Ivan poses the following challenge to his brother Alyosha:

> Imagine that you yourself are erecting the edifice of human fortune with the goal of, at the finale, making people happy, of at last giving them peace and quiet, but that in order to do it it would be necessary and unavoidable to torture to death only one tiny little creature, that same little child that beat its breast with its little fist, and on its unavenged tears to found that edifice, would you agree to be the architect on those conditions, tell me and tell me truly?[28]

Similar sentiments are recorded by a number of contemporary philosophers. Eleonore Stump, for example, emphasizes the importance of tying the benefit

won by human suffering to the person undergoing the suffering:

> What I argue is that there is something morally repulsive about supposing that the point of allowing a child to suffer is some abstract benefit for the race as a whole and, therefore, that the good which justifies a child's pain must be a benefit *for that child*.[29]

This view is also endorsed by Alston, who writes that

> A perfectly good God would not wholly sacrifice the welfare of one of His intelligent creatures simply in order to achieve a good for others, or for Himself. This would be incompatible with His concern for the welfare of each of His creatures.[30]

Similarly, Marilyn Adams holds that

> The dimension of Divine goodness most at stake in the problem of evil is not that of producer-of-global-goods, but rather that of goodness-to-created-persons. Thus, what needs explanation is not merely *how* God can ensure the *global* defeat of evil by good, but *how* God could be *good enough* to created persons, despite their participation in horrors.[31]

Finally, on the other side of the theist-nontheist divide, Michael Tooley writes:

> It is morally permissible for an omnipotent and omniscient being to allow a morally innocent individual to suffer only if that suffering will benefit the individual in question, or, at least, if it is sufficiently likely that it will do so.[32]

SCR, quite apart from its role in the above argument advanced by Rowe, makes life more difficult for the theist in another way. For if SCR is true, then the theist cannot rely solely on theodicies – such as free will and natural law theodicies – that propose divine reasons for suffering that do not concern goods benefiting the victims in question. SCR, in other words, places an important constraint on the development of a theodicy. It is not surprising, therefore, to find many theists marshalling objections to SCR.

The case against SCR usually takes the form of counterexamples which purport to show that, under certain conditions, it is permissible to allow someone to suffer some sacrifice of their individual interests for the sake of

some common good.[33] Behan McCullagh, for example, states that

> It certainly seems unjust to make one person or animal suffer for the
> sake of another. But sometimes considerations of justice are set aside
> out of concern for the well-being of the community. Our courts punish
> people very severely sometimes to deter others from performing similar
> crimes. Some governments have conscripted people to fight, suffer and
> perhaps die on their country's behalf.[34]

But are these genuine counterexamples? The soldiers' struggle for the liber-
ation of their country, the fruits of which they may never enjoy, is one that
is *voluntarily* assumed. SCR, however, relates to involuntary suffering as
depicted in $E1$ and $E2$.[35] The other case, concerning the deterrence meas-
ures taken by the courts when imposing sentences, only serves to underline
the unfortunate consequences of rejecting SCR. Although McCullagh is
correct in saying that considerations of deterrence sometimes weigh heavily
in a court's determination of the level of the penalty, it is not clear that this
should be condoned. It may be argued, for example, that a court ruling that
relies significantly on deterrent punishments is, firstly, unjust, for it imposes
punishments on people not for what they have done but on account of other
people's tendency to do likewise; and, moreover, it is improperly coercive
and manipulative (it can be likened to an armed bank robber using the threat
of punishment to persuade others to obey) and so fails to treat people as
rational and autonomous agents.[36]

Peter van Inwagen also takes SCR to be false, particularly in situations
where (a) the agent is in a position of lawful authority and responsibility
over both the sufferer S and the 'others' who benefit from S's suffering; (b)
the good to be gained by the 'others' is considerably greater than the evil
suffered by S; (c) there is no way in which the good for the 'others' can be
secured except by allowing the evil in question to happen to S or to some-
one else no more deserving of it than S; and (d) the agent knows these things
to be true. To illustrate this, he asks us to

> consider cases of quarantine or of the right of eminent domain. Is it not
> morally permissible for the state to restrict my freedom of movement
> and action if I am the carrier of a contagious disease, or to force me to
> move if my house stands in the way of a desperately needed irrigation
> canal (one that will not benefit *me* in any way)?[37]

However, SCR addresses *intense* or *horrific* suffering, rather than the mere
inconveniences that van Inwagen depicts. But putting this aside, these cases

are not genuine counterexamples, as Stump has convincingly argued.[38] With respect to the quarantine case, a person who is made aware that she has a serious disease which can easily be transmitted to others by moving around, and yet refuses to limit her movements, may legitimately be subjected to involuntary quarantine. But the suffering that she would thus bear involuntarily is not underserved, for she would otherwise engage in movement significantly endangering the health of others. SCR, however, only applies to underserved cases of suffering. Similarly with the second case relating to the forcible removal of a person's house – given that the person is putting at risk the welfare of their community (by preventing the development of a desperately needed irrigation canal), the suffering she is forced to endure is not underserved, and so SCR is also inapplicable here.

Howard-Snyder, however, has put forward some more challenging scenarios:[39]

Case 1

Consider a state whose citizens live in abject poverty. The state receives some new technology which, if implemented, will vastly improve its citizens' quality of life. One of the side-effects of this technology, however, is that it produces pollution-causing lung cancer. The state, nevertheless, goes ahead and implements this technology against the wishes of a lone protester, who later dies of lung cancer without benefiting from the technology. Has the state acted wrongly?

Howard-Snyder thinks not. But how can this technology be said to enrich the lives of its citizens when it causes them to contract lung cancer? To overcome this problem, we may assume that the technology sometimes, but very rarely, produces pollution leading to lung cancer. Thus, this technology brings about a significantly better balance of good over evil for the community in question.

Case 2

Suppose you notice a train headed for five people bound to the track. You happen to be near a lever which, if quickly pulled, will redirect the train onto another track. You notice, however, that on this other track there is a person who, through no fault of her own, has her arms fastened to the track. And so you are fully aware that if you pull the lever, her arms will end up being crushed. Suppose that you do pull the lever, with the result that that person loses her arms undeservedly and involuntarily. Have you thereby done something wrong?

Again, Howard-Snyder thinks not. I agree with his judgment in both of these cases. What this indicates, as Howard-Snyder puts it, is that "if a forced choice arises and there is no special reason to favor the interests of the one over the interests of the others, an agent has no moral obligation to act in the interests of the individual at the expense of the others."[40] The above cases, then, are generated by situations involving 'forced choices' – that is, situations in which we are compelled to choose between the interests of an individual and the interests of some wider group or community. However, we only find ourselves in such situations due to our limited resources and abilities. The choices open to us in the above two cases are clearly not the only ones that would be available to an omnipotent and omniscient being. This suggests that, to overcome Howard-Snyder's counterexamples, SCR may be modified so as to apply only to an omnipotent, omniscient being:

> (SCR*) It is morally permissible for *an omnipotent, omniscient being* to allow another person *S* to undergo intense, involuntary, and underserved suffering only if the good secured by *S*'s suffering (or one of the goods secured by that suffering) is shared by *S* in a conscious way.

This, I submit, is a plausible moral principle. It is supported by our belief that sacrificing the interests of an innocent individual without their permission is permissible only in rare and exceptional circumstances (such as those portrayed in Cases 1 and 2). It is further supported by our belief that these circumstances are not the kind of circumstances an omnipotent, omniscient being would ever find itself in.

Premise (21) – If we accept premise (19) of Rowe's argument as expressed by SCR*, it follows that at least some of the goods for the sake of which God permits intense, involuntary, and underserved human suffering are shared by the sufferer in a conscious way. The point of the clause 'in a conscious way' is that the sufferer cannot simply have a good bestowed on her, but must also figure significantly in this good, thus requiring her conscious participation or communion. I take this to be relatively uncontroversial, for unless I consciously experience, say, the good of the beatific vision, it cannot function as a defeater of any evils in my life. It therefore follows from SCR* that the goods served by instances of intense human suffering are goods that involve, or consist of, the conscious experiences of the sufferer. Thus, (20) can be inferred from premise (19).

Premise (21) appears fairly innocuous: the conscious experiences of those who undergo suffering are things we are all familiar with. We know, in other words, the range of pleasures and pains that any one person may experience

in this lifetime. Howard-Snyder, however, rejects premise (21). He points out, firstly, that we must distinguish between good-tokens (instances or occurrences) and good-types (kinds of goods), and likewise between conscious experience tokens and types of conscious experience. The argument, he adds, must be taken to refer to types of goods and conscious experiences, for otherwise (21) turns out to be manifestly false: there are far too many tokenings of conscious experience for us to be aware of even a fraction of them. But there still remains a further ambiguity in (21) due to its lack of explicit quantifiers. Is it being claimed that we know only *some*, or *most*, or *all* of the (types of) conscious experiences of others? This leads Howard-Snyder to raise some further questions of a sceptical theist nature:

> How many of the types of conscious experience that humans *can* enjoy do we know of? A few? Half? The vast majority? All? Are the ones we *do* know of representative of the whole lot? Are there goods outside our ken that would be or could just as well be realized in an afterlife?[41]

I think it is implausible to hold that we may be unaware of many of the kinds of goods that we are able to experience. Surely, given our knowledge of human biology and psychology, we know quite well the range and types of good and bad states that we can experience. In the above quote, however, Howard-Snyder claims that the relevant goods may be realized in an afterlife, thus suggesting that the experiences such goods involve may be beyond our ken. This would only be true if, as some theistic traditions maintain, the resurrected body will be transfigured in the life to come so as to pave the way for new experiences. But the type/token distinction must not be blurred here, for the *type* of post-mortem experience said to be enjoyed by 'the blessed' is not entirely unknown to us – briefly put, the experience consists of the face-to-face vision of God. Thus, premise (21) is true if taken to refer to the conscious experiences of people with a physical nature such as ours, and must also be accepted as true by most theists (including Howard-Snyder) if taken to refer to the kinds of experiences said to be enjoyed by us in the hereafter.

But if horrific evils such as *E*1 and *E*2 can only serve goods shared by the victims of these evils, and if these goods involve the conscious experiences of the victims, experiences of which we have some knowledge, it follows that the goods served by the evils in question are likely to be known by us. This argument, I conclude, provides at least some support for RNA.

It is important to note, however, the limitations of this argument. First, the argument, as stated, only applies to cases of human suffering, and further argument is required to render it applicable to non-human suffering.[42]

Second, a distinction may be drawn between *simple* goods and *complex* goods: a complex good is one that consists of a number of distinct goods, whereas a simple good is not further divisible. The above argument establishes that, for any horrific evil E that secures some greater good G, G would fall within our ken. However, the argument does not show that, if E serves a complex good consisting of (e.g.) G_1–G_4, each of G_1–G_4 would be known (or knowable) by us. Thus, RNA, stated in terms of complex goods – If a series of goods justify God's permission of a horrendous evil E, it is likely that we would discern or be cognizant of each member of this series – is not substantiated by the above argument. This argument, then, is only a partial success.[43]

3   CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this and the previous two chapters, a variety of considerations for and against RNA have been examined, though there are, to be sure, a number of other arguments relevant to the debate over RNA than those discussed here.[44] Nevertheless, I have endeavoured to identify those arguments on either side that have the best chance of success, or at least have figured prominently in the literature. Bringing together the results of our discussion of these arguments, it may be concluded, firstly, that no good reason has been identified for rejecting or even doubting RNA on the basis of Wykstra's CORNEA critique (Chapter 5) or on the basis of arguments developed by subsequent sceptical theists that draw upon various analogies beyond the parent-child analogies favoured by Wykstra, or upon notions of complexity and progress (Chapter 6). In the present chapter, I turned to the case in support of RNA. Although Almeida and Oppy's argument from moral scepticism proved to be unsuccessful, some – albeit quite limited – grounds for thinking it reasonable to accept RNA were provided by Rowe's argument grounded in the moral principle encapsulated by SCR*. It appears, therefore, that the noseeum assumption underlying Rowe's evidential argument is not as implausible as sceptical theists sometimes suggest. But the greatest challenge for those wishing to reject this assumption still awaits – this is the problem of divine hiddenness.

NOTES

[1]   Russell, "Defenseless," pp. 196–97 – Russell also puts forward here his infamous 'blue crow' argument, according to which the view that there are reasons beyond our ken justifying God's permission of evil is like the view that there are blue crows beyond our powers of observation.

However, this argument has, I think, been shown to be ineffective by Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 319, and Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," pp. 288–89.

2   Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," pp. 208–09. A different line of argument aimed at the scepticism inherent in sceptical theism has been developed by David O'Connor and John Beaudoin, who argue that one of the hidden costs of sceptical theism is a serious curtailment of traditionally significant intellectual dimensions of theism, particularly natural theology and theodicy – see O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil: In Defense of Theism and Atheism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), pp. 219–21, and Beaudoin, "Evil, the Human Cognitive Condition, and Natural Theology," *Religious Studies* 34 (1998): 412–18. In a recent but unpublished paper ("Friendly Atheism, Skeptical Theism, and the Problem of Evil"), Rowe has also argued that the sceptical theist position leads to conclusions that are very unfriendly to traditional theism.

3   See Russell, "Defenseless," pp. 197–98, and "Why Doesn't God Intervene to Prevent Evil?" pp. 79–80; and Almeida and Oppy, "Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81 (2003): 505–06. Cf. Clement Dore, "Do Theists Need to Solve the Problem of Evil?" *Religious Studies* 12 (1976): 383–89, and Evan Fales, "Should God Not Have Created Adam?" *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 203.

4   Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 321, emphases his. A similar objection is raised by Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 292–93, and by Wykstra, "The 'Inductive' Argument from Evil: A Dialogue," p. 141.

5   See Russell, "Defenseless," p. 198. The disagreement here appears to be an extension of the internalism/externalism debate in epistemology. Alston, in the quote given above, subscribes to something like the following:

> Person *S* is morally justified in preventing evil *E* if and only if there is a morally good reason that *S* recognizes and endorses as a morally good reason for preventing *E*.

Russell, on the other hand, prefers an externalist account, according to which one can be permitted and therefore justified in doing *x* even though one is not in possession of a morally good reason for doing *x* (perhaps modelling this on the fact that one can be obligated to do *x* even though one is not aware of any obligation or duty to do *x*). Viewed in these terms, however, Alston's position loses much of its force. For suppose that Susan has an abortion that is morally permissible, but years later she comes to regret doing this. Although there is a morally good reason for her abortion which she once endorsed, she no longer endorses this reason – her abortion, however, does not thereby become morally unjustified.

6   See Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 292.

7   Russell, "Defenseless," p. 198.

8   Bergmann also joins Alston in defending this view – see the former's "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 292.

9   See Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," pp. 292–93.

10   A point conceded by Almeida and Oppy ("Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 509), to which I will return later. To say that some unknown good, in virtue of being beyond our ken, cannot serve as a moral justification for Stan's inaction is to be committed to an 'internalist' conception of moral justification; while to say that Stan's inaction may serve a different unknown good from that served by God's inaction is to invoke an 'externalist' conception of

moral justification (on the internalist/externalist distinction with respect to moral justification, see fn. 5 above).

11   See Almeida and Oppy, "Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil," pp. 510–12.

12   *Ibid.*, pp. 507, 512.

13   To be sure, (7) and subsequent variants thereof are to be understood as the claim that: If I were to prevent *E* from taking place *even though I had the opportunity to allow E to take place*, *G* would be lost and thus I would have failed to increase the good in the world despite having an opportunity to do so.

14   This argument can, of course, be generalized as follows:

  (1)   We are morally obligated to increase the amount of good in the world whenever we have the opportunity to do so. [premise]

  (2)   *E*1 is necessary for the realization of some greater good, *G*. [premise]

  (3)   (Therefore) If Stan eliminates *E*1, *G* would be lost and thus he would have failed to increase the good in the world despite having an opportunity to do so. [from 2]

  (4)   (Therefore) Stan is morally obligated to not work to eliminate *E*1. [from 1 & 3]

Arguments of this sort have been deployed by both theists and non-theists to demonstrate the untenability of the widely held assumption that, in a world created by God, there cannot be any gratuitous evil or there cannot be any evil which is not necessary for the realization of some greater good. See, for example, H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960): 107–108, William Hasker, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 23–44, and Bruce Little, *A Critical Analysis of Contemporary 'Greater-Good' Theodicies with Special Attention Given to Gratuitous Evil* (PhD dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), pp. 258–60. For some suggestions as to how a theist committed to a greater-good theodicy can respond to arguments of the above type, see Clement Dore, "Do Theodicists Mean What They Say?" *Philosophy* 49 (1974): 357–74, David O'Connor, "Hasker on Gratuitous Natural Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 12 (1995): 380–92, and Berel Dov Lerner, "Interfering with Divinely Imposed Suffering," *Religious Studies* 36 (2000): 95–102.

15   I take it that the operator 'For all we know…'(as well as the cognate operator 'It would not be surprising if … '), as employed by sceptical theists, has the following twofold connotation: (a) It is epistemically possible that… ,and (b) We cannot assign a probability value to the proposition that … .

16   I thank Graham Oppy for pointing this out to me.

17   A possible way of defending Almeida and Oppy here, suggested to me by John Schellenberg, is to say that even though the same reason why (7a) follows from (6) cannot be used to show that (7b) follows from (6), there might well be some other reason in virtue of which (7b) follows from (6) – that is to say, there might well be some other connection between *E* and *G* in virtue of which if *I* were to prevent *E*, *G* would be lost.

18   But what could ground one's acceptance of (18) if not a broad form of sceptical theism, or perhaps a prior conviction that God exists and that no goods we know of justify him in permitting many instances of evil? The answer, I think, lies with the appeal to divine omniscience as originally formulated by Stephen Wykstra.

19   Interestingly, if we turn to the historical development of sceptical theism as a response to Rowe's evidential arguments from evil, we find that initially only a moderate form of sceptical theism was advocated – see, in particular, Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments

from Suffering," p. 88. Later, however, sceptical theism was buttressed with a generalized scepticism, involving a sceptical outlook on our cognitive powers in such areas as modality and axiology – see, for example, Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," pp. 59–60, and Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," p. 279.

[20]   Similar points have been made by Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 292–93, and William Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 321. The claim that unknown goods could not play a role in morally justifying our behaviour may be contested along the following lines: Suppose someone whom I justifiably take to be authoritative assures me that a great countervailing good, otherwise unobtainable, will result if I break into my neighbour's house. Could I not then be morally justified in breaking into my neighbour's property even though I do not know what the resultant good is? But in these sorts of cases it is not the good(s) produced by my behaviour that renders that behaviour morally justified. Rather, it is my relying, in an epistemically justified way, on the authority of some person that renders my behaviour morally justified.

It may also be objected that, even if unknown goods cannot justify one's behaviour, recognition of one's ignorance concerning the likelihood of there being unknown goods can provide the requisite justification – and it is recognition of this sort that is commended by sceptical theists. The idea here is that, if you are deliberating about whether to do A and if you are aware that (a) there may well be some goods beyond our ken that would be secured by doing A, and (b) we cannot – due to our cognitive limitations – make any judgments as to how likely it is that there are unknown goods served by doing A, then you cannot make an all-things-considered judgment as to whether you ought to do A. But given that you are unable to make such an all-things-considered judgment, you are entirely within your rights in choosing to do A – indeed, no one is in a position to criticize any choice you make in these circumstances. I concede that this may be an effective criticism of consideration (I), but only if sceptical theism is given the kind of broad construal mentioned above.

[21]   Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 217; cf. Swinburne, "The Problem of Evil," in Stuart C. Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 92, and *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 224. For an excellent discussion of Swinburne's position, see David McNaughton, "Is God (Almost) a Consequentialist? Swinburne's Moral Theory," *Religious Studies* 38 (2002): 265–81, and Swinburne's reply on pp. 301–06 of the same issue.

[22]   Almeida and Oppy, "Sceptical Theism and Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 509.

[23]   Perhaps situations such as the following might be thought to be counterexamples to the claim made in the main text: Suppose that God told you that he wanted a certain rape to go ahead in order to secure some great good. But then your permitting this rape would be the right thing to do, despite the fact that you do not occupy the requisite role of creator, sustainer, etc. It would be a strange God indeed who counselled you to act in such a way. Be that as it may, the problem identified here can be resolved by specifying the relevant roles in a broad enough way. The claim would then be that there are evils such that no person S can be morally justified in permitting them unless S occupies role R, where R includes not only such items as 'creator of heaven and earth', but also 'recipient and executor of the commandments of God' (saints are often thought of as fulfilling the latter role).

A different line of response to Almeida and Oppy has recently been suggested by Michael Bergmann and Michael Rea – see their paper, "In Defence of Sceptical Theism: A Reply to Almeida and Oppy," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83 (2005): 241–51.

[24]   Rowe puts forward this argument in "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 123–24, and "Ruminations about Evil," p. 73.

[25]   This objection can be found in Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," pp. 46–47; Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," pp. 325–27; Draper, "Probabilistic Arguments from Evil," *Religious Studies* 28 (1992): 311–13; Christlieb, "Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of Evil?" pp. 51–52; Sennett, "The Inscrutable Evil Defense against the Inductive Argument from Evil," pp. 224–26; Martin, *The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy*, pp. 45–48; Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 295; and Tooley, "Opening Statement," sections 4.4.1–4.4.2, in Tooley and Plantinga, *Knowledge of God*. A similar criticism may be levelled against Rowe's *P*. Terry Christlieb, for example, objects that Rowe – in holding that all known goods fail to justify God's permission of *E*1 or *E*2 – illegitimately assumes that all the goods we know of, and which are such that we can tell whether they would justify God's permission of *E*1 or *E*2, are a representative sample of all the goods we know of ("Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of Evil?" pp. 51–52). Similarly, Alston emphasizes that it is not only the possibility of there being unknown goods that needs to be considered, but also the possibility of there being known goods whose conditions of realization are unknown to us ("Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," pp. 315–16).

[26]   See Rowe, "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," pp. 89–91, and "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 267.

[27]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 244. A similar argument is advanced by J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 90.

[28]   Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book V, ch. 4, p. 282.

[29]   Stump, "Suffering and Redemption: A Reply to Smith," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 433, emphasis hers. Stump also defends this position in "The Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 411, and in "Providence and the Problem of Evil," in Thomas P. Flint (ed.), *Christian Philosophy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), p. 66. According to Stump, Thomas Aquinas also accepted SCR – see Stump's "Aquinas on the Sufferings of Job," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 51–52.

[30]   Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," p. 48.

[31]   Adams, "Theodicy Without Blame," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 235, emphases hers. Adams also advances this position in "Problems of Evil: More Advice to Christian Philosophers," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 134–36, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 63 (1989): 302–04, and *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), pp. 29–31. Cf. Plantinga's thoughts on this topic in *Warranted Christian Belief*, pp. 493–94.

[32]   Tooley, "The Argument from Evil," p. 113. Another proponent of SCR from the nontheist camp is Bruce Russell – see his "The Persistent Problem of Evil," pp. 127–28. SCR has, of course, much in common with the Kantian imperative to always treat another human being as an end in himself or herself and never simply as a means.

[33]   Cf. Thomas Tracy, "Victimization and the Problem of Evil: A Response to Ivan Karamazov," *Faith and Philosophy* 9 (1992): 312–13, where a different line of attack against

SCR is developed. Tracy begins with the view that creatures receive their lives from God as a gift that God is under no obligation to give. He then adds (rather implausibly) that God, as giver of this good, is entitled to distribute it in a way that sacrifices the interests of the few for the sake of the many. A similar position to Tracy's is advocated by Swinburne in *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 216–17.

[34]   C. Behan McCullagh, "Evil and the God of Love," *Sophia* 31 (1992): 55.

[35]   McCullagh is, of course, referring to (military) conscription, a system whereby service in the army is *enforced* rather than volunteered. But, at least in some countries, even if one were conscripted, one has the option of refusing to serve in the army by becoming a conscientious objector. And insofar as the right to conscientious objection is not recognized, I would be inclined to say that conscription of this variety is unethical.

[36]   For a defence of this view of deterrence, see R.A. Duff, *Trials and Punishments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 178–86. For an opposing view, see Johannes Andenaes, *Punishment and Deterrence* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1974), ch. 5, pp. 129–51.

[37]   Peter van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16 (1988): 184, emphasis his.

[38]   See Stump, "Providence and the Problem of Evil," pp. 88–89, fn. 43.

[39]   See Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §9, pp. 61–62. See also the counterexample proffered by Charles Sayward in "Should Persons Be Sacrificed for the General Welfare?" *Journal of Value Inquiry* 16 (1982): 149–52.

[40]   Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §9, p. 62.

[41]   Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 295–96, emphases his.

[42]   Whether the argument is applicable to non-humans, and even to humans with limited cognitive capacities (e.g., infants and the severely mentally handicapped), will largely depend on whether such creatures can (consciously) experience pain. Although in this study I assume that at least some infants and animals can (consciously) experience intense pain and suffering, for a well-articulated opposing view, see Peter Harrison, "Theodicy and Animal Pain," *Philosophy* 64 (1989): 79–92, and "Do Animals Feel Pain?" *Philosophy* 66 (1991): 25–40.

[43]   A different line of argument against SCR has recently been advanced by Jeff Jordan in "Divine Love and Human Suffering," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 56 (2004): 169–78. Jordan's critique, however, relies on the assumption that there must be a connection between the good benefiting the sufferer *G* and the evil or the suffering itself *E* such that *E* is the only or the best means of achieving *G*. Although Rowe and other proponents of SCR often endorse this assumption, there is no reason why it cannot be dispensed with. For as Jordan himself intimates (see his fn. 23), a sufferer-centred good may merely be a compensatory good, rather than a good that is logically tied to the suffering in question.

[44]   In favour of RNA, for example, are the anti-scepticism considerations outlined in fn. 2 above. On the other hand, criticisms of RNA not considered here include Jane Mary Trau's view that RNA presupposes the non-existence of God and is thus question-begging (see Trau's "Fallacies in the Argument from Gratuitous Suffering," *New Scholasticism* 60 (1986): 485–89; this charge is also made by F.J. Fitzpatrick, "The Onus of Proof in Arguments about the Problem of Evil," pp. 25–27); and Terry Christlieb's view that generic forms of theism such as RST as well as expanded theisms do not provide us with sufficient information (regarding, for instance, God's goals or plans) to warrant the claim that, if such forms of theism were true, we would be privy to God's reasons for permitting evil (see Christlieb's "Which Theisms Face an Evidential Problem of

Evil?" pp. 55–61). Also relevant to the case against RNA is the modal scepticism of Peter van Inwagen, though this is employed by van Inwagen against Draper's evidential argument and not against RNA (see van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," pp. 145–47, 150, and "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell, and Gale," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 236–39).

'Elsewhere' is God's address.

<div align="right">(John K. Roth, "The Silence of God," p. 416)</div>

This is what I see and what troubles me. I look around me in all directions, and see nothing but darkness everywhere. Nature offers me nothing that is not a matter of doubt and disquiet. If I saw no sign of a God there, I should decide against Him. If I saw the signs of a Creator everywhere, I should believe and be at peace. But seeing too much evidence against, and too little that is favourable, I am in a pitiable state.

<div align="right">(Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, §414, trans. J.M. Cohen)</div>

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from the words of my groaning?
O my God, I cry out by day,
but you do not answer.

<div align="right">(Psalm 22: 1– 2)</div>

Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house. Was it ever inhabited? It seemed so once. And that seeming was as strong as this. What can this mean? Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?

<div align="right">(C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, pp. 7–8)</div>

8. THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

It has seemed to many people, theists and non-theists alike, that God is in some sense hidden. God's nature, intentions, will, even his very existence and love or concern for us do not present themselves in an entirely clear manner to everyone, not even to every sane, well-balanced, honest adult. This can be a source of perplexity, for if certain facts about God (such as his existence) are meant to have far-reaching ramifications in many areas of our lives, it is remarkable that there should be widespread ignorance of these facts. Indeed, the painful experience of the silence of God in the face of intense suffering may provoke not just perplexity, but an existential crisis of faith, leading to a collapse of trust in God. It is perhaps with some justification, then, that the problem of divine hiddenness is sometimes viewed as an acute form of the problem of evil.

As a contribution to the recent surge of interest in divine hiddenness, this chapter examines the bearing of the hiddenness of God on the evidential problem of evil as developed by Rowe. To begin with, I return to Rowe's noseeum assumption (RNA), distinguishing different versions of this assumption and then relating it to the problem of divine hiddenness. A further investigation into the prospects for RNA is then launched, this time in the light of the hiddenness of God, with the aim of determining whether any support can be generated for Rowe's evidential argument.

1   WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

In Chapters 5–7 the aim was to assess Rowe's noseeum inference by examining arguments put forward in support and against Rowe's noseeum

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assumption, where this was taken to consist of the following proposition:

> *RNA*: If there are goods justifying God's permission of horrendous evil,
> it is likely that we would discern or be cognizant of such goods.

The conclusion we arrived at was that it is more reasonable to affirm than to refrain from affirming RNA. But let's assume, for the sake of argument, that this conclusion is wrong. Let's assume, in other words, that due to some of the reasons presented by Wykstra in Chapter 5 or in light of some of the arguments considered in Chapter 6, it is far more likely than not that we would not have epistemic access to God's reasons for permitting horrendous evil, if such reasons there be. This, however, will not suffice to dispose of Rowe's evidential argument. For as Howard-Snyder has pointed out, Rowe need not be committed to RNA, but only to one of the following weaker noseeum assumptions:

> *RNA*$_2$: If there are goods justifying God's permission of horrendous evil,
> it is likely that we would be cognizant of the fact that there are
> goods of that kind.
> *RNA*$_3$: If there are goods justifying God's permission of horrendous evil,
> it is unlikely that we would infer (from our inability to discern
> any such goods) that there are no goods of that kind.[1]

RNA (or RNA$_1$) is the assumption that, in situations in which there is a morally sufficient reason for God's permission of $E1$ and $E2$, we would know what that reason is. By contrast, RNA$_2$ and RNA$_3$ state that, in the relevant circumstances, we would know (or reasonably believe) that there is a sufficient reason, or we would not infer that there is no sufficient reason. To be sure, CORNEA, at least as expressed by $C_{4.2}$, does not explicitly countenance these weaker alternatives to RNA. These alternatives, however, are clearly in the spirit within which CORNEA was formulated and so there is no reason why Rowe would need to do anything beyond satisfying either RNA$_2$ or RNA$_3$ in order to comply with CORNEA.[2]

This brings us to the problem of divine hiddenness. Two levels of divine hiddenness may be distinguished:

Divine hiddenness – level 1: God's reasons for permitting horrendous evil are hidden from us.

Divine hiddenness – level 2: God hides from us the fact that he has a reason for permitting horrendous evil and/or the fact that he exists or loves us and cares about us.

I have granted (for the sake of argument) that RNA$_1$ is false, in which case it is quite likely that there is in fact divine hiddenness on level 1. We

must therefore ascend to the second level of divine hiddenness. Now, it seems that the most obvious way for God to ensure that we know that he does have good reasons for permitting horrendous evil (or to ensure that we do not falsely believe that he does not have any such reasons) is for him to make his existence or love and concern for us unambiguously clear to us. Thus, RNA_2 and RNA_3 may be combined as follows:

> RNA_4: If there are goods justifying God's permission of horrendous evil E and the nature of such goods is unknown to us (or unknowable by us), it is likely that God would make his existence or love sufficiently clear to us so that we would know that there are God-justifying goods for E, or so that we would not infer (from our failure to discern the nature of the relevant God-justifying goods) that there are no God-justifying goods for E.

The point here is not that the world does in fact exhibit level-2 divine hiddenness. Rather, the point is that, in a world in which God does not (or cannot) reveal his reasons for permitting horrendous evil, there would be no level-2 divine hiddenness. Put differently, if theism is true and there is level-1 divine hiddenness, then there must be no divine hiddenness on level 2. But is this conditional true? Herein lies the problem of divine hiddenness, or at least this is the way the problem will be construed in the present chapter.

2   ANALOGIES IN SUPPORT OF RNA$_4$

The plausibility of RNA_4 is principally derived from analogies drawn between God's relationship to us and some of the relationships we form amongst ourselves. Rowe, for example, focuses on the good-parent analogy formulated by Wykstra. As we saw in Chapter 5, Wykstra employed this analogy to highlight our cognitive limits in understanding the goods for the sake of which God permits horrendous evil. But this same analogy, as Rowe observes, can be a quite useful tool for the nontheist. For if we reason from the behaviour of a good parent to the behaviour of an omnipotent, omniscient, infinitely good God, we arrive at a conclusion at odds with sceptical theism. In the words of Rowe:

> We know that when a good, loving parent permits her child to suffer severely for some future outweighing good the child *cannot comprehend*, the loving parent then makes every effort to be consciously present to the child during his period of suffering, giving special assurances of her love, concern, and care.[3]

Rowe continues:

> So, on the basis of the good-parent analogy, we should infer that it is likely that God, too, will almost always be consciously present to humans, if not other animals, when he permits them to suffer for goods they cannot comprehend, giving special assurances of his love for them.[4]

Rowe goes on to claim that "countless numbers of human beings undergo prolonged, horrendous suffering without being consciously aware of God's presence or any special assurances of his love and comfort,"[5] and from this he draws the conclusion that either there is no God or the goods that justify God in permitting horrendous evil are more often than not goods we know of.[6] The parent analogy thus confers some plausibility to RNA$_4$, and when conjoined with the alleged fact of level-2 divine hiddenness, adds further weight to the case against sceptical theism. But as mentioned earlier, it is only RNA$_4$, not the purported fact of divine hiddenness, that concerns us here.

J.L. Schellenberg, in the context of an atheological argument derived from level-2 divine hiddenness, also draws an analogy based on human relationships that can be used in support of RNA$_4$. According to Schellenberg, an often neglected feature of the concept of a perfectly loving God is that such a being, in virtue of being perfectly loving, would seek to be personally related to us. Any adequate explication of 'God loves human beings' would include the view of God as seeking explicit, reciprocal relationship with us. To illustrate this point, Schellenberg delves into the nature of human love at its best:

> Only the best human love could serve as an analogy of Divine love, and human love at its best clearly involves reciprocity and mutuality. If I love you and so seek your well-being, I wish to make available to you all the resources at my disposal for the overcoming of difficulties in your life. But then I must also make it possible for you to draw on me *personally* – to let you benefit from my listening to your problems, from my encouragement, from my spending time together with you, and so on. In other words, I wish to make available to you the resources of an intimate personal relationship with me.[7]

Elsewhere, the seeking of personal relationship is again emphasized as an essential part of human love in its purest form:

> The best human love – the best love of parent or spouse or friend – involves seeking *meaningful personal relationship* with the beloved. It

seeks a kind of *closeness* between itself and the beloved. The lover clearly wants this for its own sake … But instrumental value comes into the picture too. The lover, being – as the best and truest lover must be – benevolently disposed toward the beloved, will also seek relationship *so that* she may offer opportunities for *explicit participation in her life*; she will allow and indeed encourage the beloved to draw from this relationship what he may need to flourish.[8]

But if, as Schellenberg claims, only the best human love could serve as an analogy of divine love, then God – like a human lover – would desire personal relationship with his beloved (i.e., his creatures) both for its own sake and for the benefits such a relationship would make available to the beloved. Clearly, the benefits of a personal relationship with God are many and varied. It is often said, for example, that a relationship with a perfectly loving God would provide us with a sense of peace, joy, and security, and would also offer us the resources for dealing with the moral weakness that is endemic to humanity.[9] But a further benefit is that we would gain the experience of God's loving presence, so that we would not be inclined to doubt his existence or love for us. This, in turn, would provide us with the assurance that, despite all the horrendous evil we face, there is a greater purpose served by such evil, even if we do not know what that purpose is. This knowledge would be enormously comforting to many people, enabling them to better bear their suffering and perhaps even preventing them from losing their faith. As Schellenberg points out,

> Life is tough, and so in a certain sense the relationship to which I refer [i.e., the personal relationship with God] *belongs* in this life. *Now*, in the midst of earthly pain and suffering and bewilderment, is when we need divine guidance, support, consolation, forgiveness. When in the afterlife of traditional theology are we going to need these things?[10]

And so we would expect a loving God, like a loving parent or partner, to pursue a personal relationship with us, to seek us out and draw near to us – an expectation that is magnified when we take into account that it is God who permits our suffering, and magnified further when we do not understand why he allows this suffering to befall us.[11]

I submit that considerations such as those adumbrated by Rowe and Schellenberg provide a *prima facie* case in support of RNA_4. It is time to consider whether this case can be defeated.

3   THE CASE AGAINST RNA$_4$

3.1   The Sceptical Theist Response

The problem of divine hiddenness has much in common with the evidential problem of evil, and so it comes as no surprise that many of the responses to Rowe's evidential argument are also offered in reply to RNA$_4$. This is particularly evident in the stance taken by some sceptical theists towards divine hiddenness. William Alston is a case in point:

> Some argue that it is incompatible with the goodness of God to leave us in ignorance as to why He permits us to suffer. Surely, these people say, a loving Father would explain to His children why He is allowing them to undergo their suffering if He could. And since God is omnipotent and omniscient, He could certainly do so. My response to this is that our ignorance of God's reasons for permitting our sufferings is just one more instance of evil the reason for permitting which we cannot see. Hence the present objection simply amounts to saying that my position implies that there is a certain kind of evil God's reason for permitting which we cannot discern. But of course! That's not an objection; it's a restatement of the common starting point from which my opponents and I go in opposite directions.[12]

Michael Bergmann also applies the 'God's reasons are inscrutable' strategy to divine hiddenness.[13] He notes that the proponent of RNA$_4$ begins with the following assumption:

(1)   If God exists and the goods that justify God in permitting *E*1 and *E*2 are beyond our ken, then either
   (a)   we would not have divine silence (i.e., it is likely that we would at least have assurances of God's love and of the fact that there *is* a good that justifies God in permitting such horrendous evils, even though we do not know what that good is), or
   (b)   there is some good that justifies God in permitting divine silence.

Bergmann then points out that, according to the advocate of RNA$_4$, (1a) is much more likely than (1b). But to assume that, the proponent of RNA$_4$ must hold that it is likely that

(2)   No good justifies God in permitting divine silence.

But what reason is there to accept (2)? One may, of course, rely on our inability to discern any good served by divine silence:

    (3) No good we know of justifies God in permitting divine silence.

Now we are faced with a noseeum inference analogous to Rowe's inference from P to Q. But this way of justifying RNA$_4$ is subject to the same criticisms levelled against Rowe's inference. That is to say, one may object that, given the distance between divine omniscience and our finite grasp of God's purposes, it would not be surprising if there were a reason beyond our ken for God's silence in the face of inscrutable evil. Thus, the inference from (3) to (2), like Rowe's noseeum inference, is an illegitimate one. But then, *contra* RNA$_4$, divine hiddenness on level 1 need not rule out divine hiddenness on level 2. For if a perfectly good being allows us to undergo suffering for the sake of some unknown good, such a being may also choose to not manifest himself and his love to us for the sake of some unknown good.[14]

Before responding to this sceptical theist challenge, it may be worth looking at Rowe's initial response to it. According to Rowe, Bergmann can be credited with showing that *one* way of justifying RNA$_4$ is by appealing to the noseeum inference from (3) to (2). But in Rowe's view, this is not the *only way* of supporting RNA$_4$, for one can simply rely on the parent analogy outlined earlier in order to justify one's commitment to RNA$_4$. As Rowe puts it,

> It is as though Bergmann has discovered a road that starts out in the direction of Rome but doesn't in fact lead to Rome. This is not uninteresting. But to conclude from this fact that there is no road that leads to Rome is not quite right. One can conclude the latter only by showing that if this road doesn't lead to Rome, none other does.[15]

I must side with Bergmann here. The parent analogy as employed by Rowe only shows that in situations where God permits us to suffer for a good we cannot understand, it is to be expected that God would be consciously present to us, expressing his love and concern, *unless* he has a good reason for not disclosing himself to us in this way. Rowe, however, has not shown that such a reason is not available to God. For as the sceptical theist points out, it would not be surprising if there were reasons we are not aware of lying behind God's silence. It is incumbent upon Rowe, therefore, to show that it is unlikely that there is some unknown good that justifies God in remaining silent. To borrow Rowe's terminology, the road traversed by Bergmann is the only way to get to Rome.

What, then, can be said be way of reply to the sceptical theist view of divine silence as serving goods beyond our ken? It may be noted that if an argument against this view can be provided, then that argument – in conjunction with our ignorance of any goods justifying divine silence [as expressed by proposition (3)] together with the analogies of Rowe and Schellenberg – would provide compelling grounds for taking (1a) to be more likely than (1b). This, of course, would put us in a position to justifiably assent to RNA_4.

Given the continuity between the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness, arguments directed against the sceptical theist response to the former problem may also be employed here. The argument of Section 2 in Chapter 7, for example, can also be applied to divine hiddenness.[16] But here I wish to focus on a different line of thought, one developed quite persuasively by Rowe with respect to the sceptical theist perspective on divine silence.[17] Rowe points out that to suppose that divine silence serves an unknown good is to be committed to a number of propositions which, when grouped together as a set, strike us as being highly implausible or counterintuitive. In particular, one who adopts the sceptical theist response to RNA_4 subscribes to all of the following:

1. A being of infinite wisdom and power is *unable* to prevent any instance of horrendous suffering without thereby forfeiting a greater good1.
2. A being of infinite wisdom and power is *unable* to enable those who undergo horrendous suffering to understand just what good1 is (for which their suffering was necessary) without thereby forfeiting a greater good2.
3. A being of infinite wisdom and power is *unable* to be consciously present to those who undergo horrendous suffering without thereby forfeiting another greater good3 – despite the despair and loneliness of those who undergo horrendous suffering without any conscious awareness of God's presence.
4. A being of infinite wisdom and power is *unable* to enable those who undergo horrendous suffering without any conscious awareness of God's presence to understand just what good3 is (for the sake of which their suffering without any conscious awareness of God's presence was necessary) without forfeiting another greater good4.[18]

According to Rowe, anyone who seriously reflects on this set of propositions will see the "inherent implausibility" in the idea that these propositions reflect the way things are.[19] Rowe's point is that it borders on the absurd to believe that good states of affairs are so related to the vast array of horrendous

evils that an infinitely powerful and infinitely loving being is unable to pre-
vent any of these evils without (a) forfeiting a greater good1, (b) forfeiting
a greater good2 if he enables the sufferers to understand good1, (c) forfeit-
ing a greater good3 if he is consciously present to those who suffer for a
good1 they cannot understand, and (d) forfeiting a greater good4 if he
enables the sufferers to understand good3. The credibility of this view is
strained to such an extent that we would require strong evidence for the
existence of God before we could reasonably accept it.[20]

I regard Rowe's reply to the sceptical theist as being entirely effective.
Committing oneself to the above set of four propositions comes at a great
cost – viz., a significant downturn in plausibility – which can only be offset
by very convincing reasons to believe that there is a God.[21] This is the dan-
ger inherent in the inscrutable goods strategy. As indicated in the discussion
of the progress argument and the argument from complex goods in Chapter
6, the inscrutable goods strategy would always be available to the theist no
matter how bad life may become – even, in fact, if we were to suffer hor-
rendously and continuously from birth to death. But as Rowe has stated,
"surely there must be some point at which the appalling agony of human
and animal existence as we know it would render it unlikely that God
exists."[22] The sceptical theist, however, seems unable to countenance any
such point.[23]

3.2   The Appeal to Human Freedom

A more plausible response to RNA$_4$ may involve an appeal to the good
of free will. One may, in other words, deploy a version of the free will
theodicy in response to the problem of divine hiddenness raised by RNA$_4$ by
arguing that, were God's existence or love unambiguously evident to us, our
freedom would in some significant respect be curtailed. Here I will consider
two arguments of this sort, one developed by John Hick in the context of his
'soul-making' theodicy and the other put forward by Richard Swinburne,
but each making appeal to a different aspect of human freedom.

3.2.1   Hick's Freedom in Relation to God.   In Hick's view, the world
can be seen as a vale of soul-making in which we freely and autonomously
come to develop and perfect certain valuable traits of moral character, and to
know and to love God. Thus, for an environment to be conducive to soul-
making, there must be room for genuine faith and trust in God – it must be
possible, in other words, to enter freely into a personal relationship with
God. Such freedom, however, can only be secured if God's presence and love
are not made manifestly clear to us. Hence the necessity of epistemic

distance. In Hick'swords:

> Let us suppose that the infinite personal God creates finite persons to
> share the life which He imparts to them. If He creates them in His
> immediate presence, so that they cannot fail to be conscious from the
> first of the infinite divine being and glory, goodness and love, wisdom,
> power and knowledge in whose presence they are, they will have no
> creaturely independence in relation to their Maker. They will not be
> able to *choose* to worship God, or to turn to Him freely as valuing spir-
> its responding to infinite Value. In order, then, to give them the freedom
> to come to Him, God creates them at a distance – not a spatial but an
> epistemic distance.[24]

This theme of the necessity of epistemic distance has become a constant in
Hick's numerous writings. In *Faith and Knowledge*, his earliest published
discussion of this topic, the term 'epistemic distance' had not yet been intro-
duced but is nonetheless clearly foreshadowed. Hick points out that "to know
God is not simply to know one more being who inhabits this universe."
Rather, it is to know "the One who is responsible for our existence and who
determines our destiny; One in whose will lies our final good and blessed-
ness … and One whose commands come with the accent of absolute and
unconditional demand."[25] Therefore, the awareness of the existence of such
a being must affect us in a way that the awareness of other human persons
can only offer a remote parallel. Hick states that the nearest analogy on the
human level is the becoming aware of another which at the same time is a
falling in love with that other. The awareness of God, then, is not a casual
observation, but one in which the observer is profoundly involved and
affected, so that the whole course of her life may thenceforth be changed.
God must therefore be *deus absconditus* – he must stand back and hide him-
self behind his creation, leaving us the freedom to recognize or fail to recog-
nize his dealings with us.[26]

Since *Faith and Knowledge*, this line of thought has been repeated and
elaborated by Hick in various places. In *Evil and the God of Love*, for exam-
ple, Hick writes:

> Human freedom *vis-à-vis* God presupposes an initial separateness and
> a consequent degree of independence on man's part. In creating finite per-
> sons to love and be loved by Him God must endow them with a certain rel-
> ative autonomy over against Himself … God must set man at a distance
> from Himself, from which he can then voluntarily come to God. But how

can anything be set at a distance from One who is infinite and omnipresent? Clearly spatial distance means nothing in this case. The kind of distance between God and man that would make room for a degree of human autonomy is epistemic distance.[27]

Later, in his 1981 piece, "An Irenaean Theodicy," Hick again emphasized the necessity of epistemic distance for human freedom:

> In order to be a person, exercising some measure of genuine freedom, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but at a 'distance' from God. This 'distance' cannot of course be spatial; for God is omnipresent. It must be an epistemic distance, a distance in the cognitive dimension.[28]

The freedom, however, that Hick has in mind is freedom in relation to our Maker:

> Within such a situation [epistemic distance from God] there is the possibility of the human being coming freely to know and love one's Maker. Indeed, if the end-state which God is seeking to bring about is one in which finite persons have come in their own freedom to know and love him, this requires creating them initially in a state which is not that of their already knowing and loving him.[29]

Similarly, in his fourth and latest edition of *Philosophy of Religion*, published in 1990, Hick states:

> If men and women had been initially created in the direct presence of God (who is infinite in life, power, goodness, and knowledge), they would have no genuine freedom in relation to their Maker. In order to be fully personal and therefore morally free beings, they have accordingly … been created at a distance from God – not a spatial but an epistemic distance, a distance in the dimension of knowledge.[30]

In short, if God were immediately and overwhelmingly evident to us, we would be irresistibly drawn to him and thus we would be unable to *freely* enter into a relationship with him. It is vital, therefore, that the world is religiously ambiguous, capable of being interpreted either theistically or naturalistically. Borrowing a phrase from Bonhoeffer, Hick writes that "the world must be to man, to some extent at least, *etsi deus non daretur*, 'as if there were no God'."[31]

In order to properly assess Hick's position, it is imperative to be clear as to what exactly this position amounts to. In particular, it is important to understand the kind of freedom Hick claims is made possible by epistemic distance. To this end, we may distinguish three views on the necessity of epistemic distance:

ED$_1$: Epistemic distance is necessary for freedom with respect to the belief that God exists.

ED$_2$: Epistemic distance is necessary for freedom with regard to the choice between morally good and morally evil courses of action.

ED$_3$: Epistemic distance is necessary for freedom with respect to a personal relationship or commitment to God.[32]

These three varieties of epistemic distance are not always clearly separated by commentators of Hick's work. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find different varieties of epistemic distance being attributed to Hick by different interpreters. It is necessary therefore to provide a brief overview of ED$_1$–ED$_3$ in relation to Hick's writings. As I hope to show, only ED$_3$ faithfully represents Hick's views.

Beginning with epistemic distance as exemplified by ED$_1$, this is the view that, if we were placed in epistemic immediacy with God, we could not freely choose to believe that there is a God. An initial difficulty with this view is that, insofar as our beliefs are not under our direct voluntary control, there can be no freedom to directly choose to believe (or not to believe) that there is a God. But perhaps the proponent of ED$_1$ only intends to espouse an *indirect* form of voluntary control, according to which we can, and often do, exercise a good deal of indirect control over our beliefs. For example, a religious believer who has some doubts about the truth of her faith may join a monastic order in an attempt to seclude herself from people and books that would, in her opinion, have a detrimental effect on her faith. Or more subtly, someone who is investigating the truth or falsity of a particular matter may sift through the evidence for and against selectively, and then perhaps take steps to forget that they had done so. The relationship between belief and the will is a complex one and cannot be adequately dealt with here. It seems, nevertheless, quite irrational or irresponsible to set out to believe a certain proposition by such means as avoiding the company of non-believers or selective attention to supporting considerations. Theodore Drange has expressed this point well:

Beliefs are like 'a road map through the pathways of life', where the more closely the map matches the actual roads, the better. To interject *will* into the process of belief formation, even indirectly, would go counter to that

function of belief, for it would interject something additional to experi-
ence and thereby prevent the belief from representing reality exactly as
experienced. It would be like capriciously altering a road map.[33]

But if a reliably formed belief cannot be one over which we have immedi-
ate or even indirect control, then the belief that God exists (at least to the
extent that it is a rational belief) cannot be one that is freely chosen. This
constitutes a strong objection to the appeal to freedom of belief as it occurs
in ED_1.[34]

Hick, however, does not explicitly affirm or reject ED_1.[35] But even if it
were shown to be true, this would no doubt be regarded by him as being of
no great moment. In line with the major theistic religious traditions, Hick
views the crucial element in faith as residing not so much with the belief
that God exists, but with the belief *in* God – that is, a personal commitment
to God, involving love and trust (although the latter, of course, presupposes
the former). A mere notional or intellectual assent to the existence of God
has in itself little or no positive religious value unless it is supplemented by
a response of unqualified worship and devotion.[36] Thus, whether or not we
are free to believe that God exists is not as central to Hick's concerns as the
freedom to believe in God.

Of course, if the freedom to believe in God cannot be had without the free-
dom to believe that God exists, so that ED_1 is taken to be a necessary condi-
tion for ED_3, then ED_1 assumes a greater degree of relevance. It may be
argued, for example, that if there were a compelling demonstration of the
existence of God, one that no person could understand without at the same
time assenting to it, our knowledge of God would be coerced in a way that
would preclude us from freely placing our faith and trust in God. A view of
this sort has been defended by Alasdair MacIntyre:

> If we could produce logically cogent arguments we should produce the
> kind of certitude that leaves no room for decision; where proof is in
> place, decision is not. We do not decide to accept Euclid's conclusions;
> we merely look to the rigour of his arguments. If the existence of God
> were demonstrable we should be as bereft of the possibility of making a
> free decision to love God as we should be if every utterance of doubt or
> unbelief was answered by thunder-bolts from heaven. But this kind of
> free decision is the essence of the Christian religion.[37]

MacIntyre thus draws a strong connection between 'belief that' and 'belief
in': if we were not free to believe that God exists, we would thereby lose our
freedom to respond to God with love and trust – that is, to believe in God.

Unfortunately, Hick has sometimes been associated with this view. Swinburne, for example, takes Hick to be advancing "the argument that if there were a proof of the existence of God which became known, those who heard and understood it would have no option but to believe, and in that case faith would not be meritorious."[38] This, however, could not be further from the truth. Immediately after outlining MacIntyre's argument, Hick asks a series of rhetorical questions aimed at showing that a theistic proof, even if compelling, could not by itself lead to a religious response of worship and devotion.[39] As Hick stated in the context of a related discussion:

> The assent that a valid theistic proof could compel would be (in Newman's terminology) a merely notional assent. Such a demonstrative proof might ensure assent to the proposition 'God exists' but could not bring about a distinctively religious and worshipping response to the thought of God as an existing being. A purely non-religious response – 'there is a God, so what?' – would still be possible.[40]

Hick, therefore, does not view the belief that God exists as inevitably leading to belief in God, and so he would reject the claim that ED_3 presupposes ED_1. This, I think, is the correct and commonly accepted view of the relation between 'belief that' and 'belief in'. It is often pointed out, for example, that knowing of God's existence is not sufficient; one must love and worship God as well. As is stated in James 2:19, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder." The gap between 'belief that' and 'belief in' is further highlighted by the fact that someone could become so embittered by the circumstances of their life that they would reject God (or 'spit on his face', as it were) even if they knew that he exists. Alternatively, someone may believe that God exists, but be unwilling to change in such a way as to make God the centre of their life. Thus, the belief or even knowledge that God exists does not by itself launch one in the direction of a full-blown faith, but rather leaves open a range of responses to God.[41]

But ED_2 also fails to capture Hick's notion of epistemic distance. Hick speaks of epistemic distance as necessary for freedom *in relation to God*, where this is invariably understood as the freedom to turn to God in love and trust, or the freedom to enter into a personal relationship with God. However, the kind of freedom envisioned by ED_2 is *moral* freedom – that is, the ability to voluntarily do that which is right. Such freedom may well include the ability to make a freely chosen commitment to serve God, but it would also

encompass the ability to freely do that which is morally permissible or obligatory when dealing with one's fellow humans. According to Hick, however, if epistemic distance were removed, it is not our moral freedom that would be jeopardized:

> If we were from the beginning set 'face to face' with God we would never be able to make a free response to the Deity. There could be no question of freely loving and choosing to worship One whose very presence utterly overwhelms us.[42]

> To be inescapably aware that we are in the presence of the ultimate power of the universe, who is limitlessly good, who knows us through and through, and who loves us with a limitless love, would be a situation in which we could only respond by worship and an answering love.[43]

Thus, epistemic immediacy with God would endanger our ability to freely respond to God's love with love of our own. But Hick does not go on to say, as G. Stanley Kane has alleged, that "if men were not at an epistemic distance from God, it would be impossible for them ever to commit sin."[44] Nor does Hick claim, as R. Douglas Geivett would have us believe, that "if human persons lived in the immediate presence of God, personal freedom regarding moral choices would be absolutely precluded, for such persons could not help but adjust their wills to that of God."[45] A variant of this view will be examined in the following Section, but it is not a view endorsed by Hick, who is only concerned to show that epistemic immediacy with God would result in a loss of freedom to adopt any attitude we like toward God (whether it be one of love, hate, or indifference).[46]

Moving beyond purely interpretive matters, it remains to be seen whether ED$_3$ is acceptable. This translates into the question of whether we could freely decide to enter into a loving relationship with a being whose presence is impressed upon our immediate consciousness. It seems difficult to deny that if the reality of God were forced upon our attention, particularly in the same way in which the physical world impresses itself upon our attention, we could not freely accept or reject a personal relationship with God – we would simply find ourselves in such a relationship without having freely chosen it and without being able to surrender it.

Rowe has objected that a person existing in epistemic immediacy with God – that is, a person who is fully aware of God's power and greatness, of God's immense love for all his creatures, and so on – may nevertheless not choose to respond to God's love with love of her own. In denying this, claims Rowe, Hick is confusing *coming to have a very good reason to*

worship and love God and *being compelled to worship and love God*. But
as Rowe reminds us, "it is, alas, part of the very nature of freedom to have
the power not to do what one has a very good reason to do."[47] This objec-
tion, however, has little to recommend it. In a situation in which God's
presence were overwhelmingly evident to us, we would not merely have
good reason to devote ourselves to God. We would be drawn into God's
spiritual 'magnetic field' in such a way that we would also have a strong,
perhaps irresistible, inclination to reciprocate God's love. Any temptation
to reject God or be indifferent to him would lose much, if not all, of its
force.[48]

Hick's position has been subjected to a more penetrating critique by
Schellenberg.[49] Schellenberg argues that Hick succumbs to a false dichotomy:
either God's presence is overwhelmingly evident to us, or it is not unam-
biguously evident to us at all. But an overwhelming sense of God's presence –
one in which God is present to us unmistakably and continuously – is
not the only alternative to our actual situation of religious ambiguity.
Consider, for example, the following possible state of affairs depicted by
Schellenberg:

> Suppose … that the world is one in which all human beings who evince
> a capacity for personal relationship with God have an experience as of
> God presenting himself to them, which they take to be caused by God and
> which actually *is* caused by God presenting himself to their experience.
> This experience, let us say, is non-sensory – an intense apparent aware-
> ness of a reality at once ultimate and loving which (1) produces the belief
> that God is lovingly present (and ipso facto, that God exists), (2) contin-
> ues indefinitely in stronger or weaker forms and minimally as a 'back-
> ground awareness' in those who do not resist it, and (3) takes more
> particular forms in the lives of those who respond to the beliefs to which
> it gives rise in religiously appropriate ways.[50]

Schellenberg, I think rightly, states that there is nothing incoherent in the
description given of this world. Furthermore, our experience of the divine
reality in that world would be far more vivid than it generally is in the
actual world, but it would not have the forceful or 'coercive' character that
comes with our experience of the physical environment. That is to say, our
religious experiences would not be incapable of being ignored or overrid-
den. Suppose, for example, that an inhabitant of this alternative world, *S*,
was faced with some evidence against theism, perhaps in the form of her
own experience of evil and knowledge of the evil experienced by others.
Indeed, Schellenberg allows that individuals in such a world would not

"feel less in the way of pain when serious illness befell them or escape altogether the emotional havoc caused by, for example, a death in the family."[51] Despite this contrary evidence, *S* would be able to fall back on her own experience of God's presence as well as on the public evidence concerning the universality of this kind of experience (virtually every individual *S* believes to be honest testifies to having this experience) and the uniformity in the descriptions given of it. But Schellenberg adds – and this is the important point for our purposes – that *S* could in the face of evil give up her belief that there is a God. To be sure, her loss of belief could not be attributed to the force of contrary evidence, since she has within her reach far greater evidence in support of theism. Her loss of belief is, rather, to be accounted for in terms of self-deception, perhaps brought about by bitterness or resentment. Thus, non-belief in such a world would always be culpable or unreasonable. But what is important to note is that in this world the belief that God exists, as well as belief in God, are not inevitable. For if the awareness of God's presence is only persuasive and not overwhelming, then theistic belief (whether it be 'belief that' or 'belief in') can be resisted, or (as in *S*'s case) once acquired can be surrendered. Schellenberg therefore concludes that the forcefulness of religious experience need not be such as to place us in the immediate presence of God, thus removing all doubt and crushing our autonomy. Rather, our awareness of God need only be strong enough to remove the possibility of reasonable or inculpable nonbelief, thereby preserving our freedom in relation to God.

But perhaps even a persuasive experience of God of the kind envisaged by Schellenberg is not required. Recall that the aim here is to investigate the truth of the claim that, if God were to permit horrendous evil for the sake of some unknown good, then he would make his existence or love abundantly clear to us. Now, God could make his existence abundantly clear to us in a number of ways. He could create us in epistemic immediacy with himself – but as Hick suggests, God's presence would in this situation be so overwhelming as to remove our ability to freely commit ourselves to him. Or God could, as Schellenberg suggests, be significantly less hidden, thus endowing us with a vivid sense of his presence while at the same time keeping our freedom intact. But even if this alternative advocated by Schellenberg is rejected, there is another avenue available to God that trades on the distinction between 'belief that' and 'belief in'. As noted earlier, one can hold the belief that God exists without in any way believing in, or having faith in, God. But then God could have created us in such a way that we accord the proposition that God exists the same self-evident status accorded to items like '2 + 3 = 5' and 'If a thing is red, then it is

coloured'. What I have in mind, in other words, is a world in which 'God exists' strikes *every intellectually capable person* as self-evidently true in the same way that the basic truths of arithmetic and the much-maligned class of analytic truths strike nearly all of us as obviously true.[52] Clearly, in such circumstances, the belief that God exists would be neither freely chosen nor meritorious – I cannot see, however, why this should be any cause for concern (indeed, given what I have said earlier, if a belief were freely chosen it may, in fact, not be meritorious). But what value could there be in having the belief that God exists implanted in our cognitive make-up? This brings us back to RNA$_4$. The mere belief that God exists would not compel us, or perhaps even incline us, to engage in a personal relationship with God. Nevertheless, by simply believing that there is a perfectly loving God we would not be led to think, when faced with inscrutable evil, that such evil is in fact pointless. And since this would enable us (or some of us) to better deal with our own suffering and that experienced by others (particularly those close to us), it appears to be a state of affairs a perfectly loving being would want to bring about.[53]

3.2.2 Swinburne's Moral Freedom.

Rather then defending epistemic distance as necessary for a freely chosen personal commitment to God, Swinburne views epistemic distance as making possible moral freedom – this, of course, is the position encapsulated by ED$_2$. Swinburne's case in support of ED$_2$ is first expressed in *The Existence of God* in the course of a discussion of the implications of God communicating to us at regular intervals and thereby making his existence a matter of common knowledge. The implications of such a scenario are described as follows:

> Knowing that there was a God, men would know that their most secret thoughts and actions were known to God; and knowing that he was just, they would expect for their bad actions and thoughts whatever punishment was just. Even if a good God would not punish bad men further, still they would have the punishment of knowing that their bad actions were known to God. They could no longer pose as respectable citizens; God would be too evident a member of the community. Further, in seeing God, as it were, face to face, men would see him to be good and worshipful, and hence would have every reason for conforming to his will. In such a world men would have little temptation to do wrong – it would be the mark of both prudence and reason to do what was virtuous. Yet a man only has a genuine choice of destiny if he has reasons for pursuing either good or evil courses of action; for … a man can only perform an action which he has some reason to do.[54]

Similarly, in a later paper, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," Swinburne states that, were God to inform me of the consequences of a proposed course of action by telling me in advance what he will bring about if I do the action, the result would be that

> I would regard my every movement as overseen by an all-knowing and perfectly good being, namely a God who would therefore wish me to be good, and value me and so preserve me, in so far as I was good. The reasons for being good would be virtually irresistible: a genuine choice of destiny would not be open to me, at least given that men are as rational as they now are … With their present nature (involving amount of depravity [*sic*]), men who learnt of the consequences of their actions by understanding some sign as God telling them what the consequences were would be so suffocated by God that they had little real choice of destiny … In order to give me the sort of choice demanded by the free will defence, God must give me some epistemic elbow-room.[55]

According to Swinburne, then, in a world in which God is not hidden, there would be powerful reason not to do what is wrong. For if we were to have a permanent and intimate sense of the presence of God, we would live our lives knowing that God is always aware of what we are doing and thinking. But such an awareness that God knows what we are doing or considering doing would have a great inhibitory effect on our actions, for it would generate such states of mind as a fear of punishment, or a wish not to displease God, or a wish not to be ashamed before God. Swinburne, in this context, quotes the words of the fifth-century monk, St Isaiah the Solitary: "Whatever you are doing, remember that God sees all your thoughts, and then you will never sin."[56] Robert McKim expresses this point equally well by noting that to exist in epistemic immediacy with God

> would be as if whenever you drove your car the chief of police were always present in the front passenger seat, observing all of your actions and ready to mete out punishments where appropriate. Or it would be as if we each had implanted in us a device that would announce regularly for all to hear what we had done that was wrong or unbecoming, as well as what we ought to have done but had failed to do, and even what wrong actions we had merely thought about doing or right actions we had merely thought about failing to do. Or it would be as if any respect in which we err would be broadcast immediately on the Internet.[57]

Thus, if the existence of God were clear and evident to us, we would be keenly aware that God – whose respect and esteem we covet – is always looking over our shoulder. But then any temptation to do wrong would be greatly weakened, so that conformity to God's will would become eminently prudent and rational. The first premise in Swinburne's argument may therefore be stated as follows:

> (4) In a situation of epistemic immediacy with God, we would have strong prudential reasons for not doing wrong.[58]

On Swinburne's view, however, the reasons we would have for not doing wrong in the requisite situation would not merely be strong, but overwhelming. Swinburne does not explicitly say whether the strength of these reasons would be such as to obliterate entirely whatever reasons we may have to do wrong. However, his talk (in the first of the two above-quoted passages from his work) of there being "*little* temptation to do wrong" suggests that, in the relevant circumstances, any reasons to do wrong may continue, but would be rendered ineffective by the much stronger desire to do good. But if the desire to do God's will is so overwhelming that any contrary desires would be rendered inefficacious, then wrongdoing would hardly strike us as tempting – there would be little temptation to do wrong. Thus, the next premise in Swinburne's case may be put as follows:

> (5) Given the strength of the reasons for not doing wrong in the relevant situation, it would require little in the way of an act of will to do what is right.

Temptation, then, would have little sway over our will, and so it would not take much to master or overcome desires to do evil. Rather than feel the pull both of good options and bad ones prior to choosing a course of action, good actions and intentions would come almost naturally to us. But then we would lose what Swinburne calls a "genuine choice of destiny" – that is to say, we would lose the freedom to develop or mould our character in such a way as to "return to the level of the beasts or to move in the direction of divinity."[59] Hence the third premise in Swinburne's argument:

> (6) If there is little temptation to do wrong, we would lack a genuine choice of destiny.

From the conjunction of these three premises, it clearly follows that

(7) (Therefore) In a situation of epistemic immediacy with God, no-one
would have a genuine choice of destiny.

Before proceeding further, it may be helpful to outline Swinburne's recent
contribution to this topic in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*.[60] The case
Swinburne offers there in support of ED$_2$ is treated by Schellenberg as a
separate argument, but I think it is better viewed as a development of argu-
ment (4)–(7) above.[61] The development in question consists in the specifi-
cation of the prudential reasons mentioned in premise (4). In his earlier
writings, Swinburne appealed to the fear of punishment as the primary or
sole inhibitor towards wrongdoing. More recently, however, he has altered
his account of the kinds of prudential reasons we would have for not doing
wrong in the relevant circumstances. Specifically, he now holds that, if we
were in constant and immediate communion with God, there would be lit-
tle temptation to do evil because, first, we would have a desire to be well
thought of by God and, second, we would have a desire for a good afterlife.

As to the first desire, the desire for divine approval, Swinburne begins
by noting that the desire to be liked – that is, to like to be thought well of by
others – is good for any person to have. Indeed, to like and to like to be liked
are essential elements of friendship, including friendship with the perfectly
good, wise, and all-powerful source of our existence. But as Swinburne
explains, the desire to be liked by God, when considered in the context of
epistemic immediacy with God, has morally damaging consequences:

If I acquire a deep awareness of the presence of God, I will then become
deeply aware that if I do bad, and especially wrong actions, the all-good
creator will strongly disapprove. Hence if I have the proper desire to be
liked, I will have a strong inclination not to do wrong; and unless that is
overborne by some even stronger desire to do wrong, there will be a bal-
ance of desire against choosing wrong and so no overall temptation to
resist reason. I will inevitably do the good.[62]

The second desire appealed to by Swinburne, the desire for a good afterlife,
is a species of the more general desire for our own future well-being.
According to Swinburne,

On both a priori and a posteriori grounds, any reflective person will con-
clude that the more reason there is for believing that there is a God, the

more reason there is for believing that if we continually do wrong, we shall not have a good afterlife.[63]

The *a priori* grounds Swinburne has in mind rest on the premise that, by merely holding the belief that there is a God and reflecting on the fact that bad acts destroy character, it would become evident that indulging in bad acts would jeopardize one's future well-being (where 'well-being' is to be understood objectively, so that something promotes one's well-being independently of whether one believe that it does). These considerations, admits Swinburne, "are only of moderate force,"[64] and so he supplements them with *a posteriori* evidence to the effect that it is commonly held amongst theistic religions that the wicked will be punished in the afterlife. But, Swinburne adds, "any reason for believing that there is a God is some reason to believe that he would tell humans (who so obviously need guidance) wherein consists human good, and so is some reason for believing that what is the common content of virtually all theistic religions is true."[65] Thus, we are led to the belief that if there is a God he will give us future well-being only if we act well. But this has disastrous consequences, since the desire for our own future well-being will make it far easier for us to choose good over evil. And when this desire is combined with the desire to be liked by God, the ability to make a serious choice between good and evil is thwarted further still. In short, epistemic immediacy with God would generate strong prudential reasons – in the form of the two aforementioned desires – for not doing wrong.

I will now turn to an assessment of Swinburne's argument, focusing in particular on objections to the first two premises.

Objections to (4)

(4) In a situation of epistemic immediacy with God, we would have strong prudential reasons for not doing wrong.

To begin with, we may assume that the prudential reasons in question are associated with divine punishment (reasons associated with divine approval and future well-being will be considered later). Swinburne does not specify how the notion of punishment is to be understood, but merely states that those who know for certain that there is a God would know that he was just and so "would expect for their bad actions and thoughts whatever punishment was just."[66] However, to properly assess Swinburne's argument, when stated in terms of punishment, we need to know, firstly, when the punishments are meant to take place (immediately following the performance of each bad action? in the distant future? in the afterlife?) and, secondly, the

nature of the punishment to be meted out (bodily harm? progressively deteriorating quality of life?).

I will assume the strongest reading, according to which punishment would take place in the here and now by way of some physical harm following each bad action. For as will be seen later, if any weaker reading of punishment is adopted the case in support of premise (5) would be put at risk. The question, then, is: Would we expect someone in intimate and constant interaction with God to believe that they will be harmed by God as soon as they do something wrong, this belief then functioning as a strong prudential reason for not doing wrong? Schellenberg contends that this question cannot reasonably be answered in the affirmative and that herein lies the failure of Swinburne's case. According to Schellenberg, it is much more reasonable to suppose that those met in experience by a loving God would either (a) be left without a clear belief about the ultimate implications of wrongdoing, or (b) come to believe that God would never refuse anyone a second chance, or (c) believe that only after persistently rejecting the good over an extended period of time, the likelihood of punishment in the hereafter would be greatly increased. He adds, however, that even if some people did expect punishment in the strong sense, this expectation would buckle under the pressure of observation: they would observe, for example, that people who fell into temptation were not immediately punished.[67]

Schellenberg's position here appears to be quite sound. Robert McKim, however, has objected that there are good grounds for thinking that a loving God would impose punishment that is both immediate and manifestly imposed in virtue of particular actions. McKim writes:

> A loving God may reasonably be expected to inflict punishment that would drastically reduce our capacity to behave morally incorrectly. Even if the punishment is not connected to particular cases of wrongdoing, and is not immediate, a loving God might inflict punishment that is sufficiently immediate and sufficiently linked to particular cases of wrongdoing that it would be a significant deterrent to wrongdoing … Moreover, punishment that is immediate and linked to particular cases of wrongdoing may itself be a catalyst for reform and therefore may actually be what makes it worthwhile to provide a second chance.[68]

It seems that McKim has lost sight of the specific kind of punishment that, according to Schellenberg, is incompatible with a perfectly loving being. One may agree that some form of punishment inflicted as a deterrent or as a catalyst for reform may be worthwhile. However, the kind of punishment envisioned by Schellenberg is "bodily harm correlated with each bad action (perhaps something analogous to electrical shock)."[69] But surely it is morally

reprehensible to inflict bodily harm on a person immediately after each of their transgressions. As a deterrent measure, such a punishment policy may have some success but would be inappropriately coercive and manipulative, and as a reforming measure it would clearly be unnecessary.

Would premise (4) be more acceptable if we thought of the prudential reasons in question not in terms of divine punishment, but in terms of our desire for divine approval and future well-being? On Schellenberg's view, anyone in an ongoing intimate relationship with God would believe that God "accords to each of us a basic dignity and value which is not altered by our actions, good or bad."[70] But if God loves us unconditionally, we would not believe that he would think less of us if we did something wrong. We would not, therefore, have the desire to be thought well of (or valued) by God. On this occasion, however, Schellenberg's position is mistaken. In desiring divine approval the believer is not (or at least need not be) desiring to be accorded a basic dignity or value, but rather desires that God approves of her *actions*. And there is no inconsistency in holding that God disapproves of our behaviour while viewing each of us as irreducibly valuable.[71]

A more potent criticism of the construal of (4) in terms of the desire for divine approval and future well-being is that such desires would, in all likelihood, be absent or significantly mitigated in those who experience intimate and continuous contact with God. It may be assumed, reasonably I think, that if God's presence were constantly manifest to us, we would believe that God would want us to do what is right because it is right. We would believe that God would not want our actions to be motivated inappropriately by, for example, the wish to avoid being less well thought of by another person or the wish to benefit or be rewarded in some way (e.g., monetary gain, career success, eternal life in heaven). But if God's existence were clear to us and we believed that God does not want us to do something in order to gain his approval or to secure some benefit, then we would not have (or would take steps to overcome) the desire to perform good actions in order to gain approval or some benefit.[72]

It seems, then, that the first premise in Swinburne's argument is unacceptable. I will now consider whether the second premise succumbs to the same fate.

Objections to (5)

(5) Given the strength of the reasons for not doing wrong in the relevant situation, it would require little in the way of an act of will to do what is right.

The question to be addressed in connection with this premise is: If we expect punishment in the strong sense to follow any wrongdoing, would the

temptation to do that which is forbidden be quashed? Of course, if the punishment was deferred to the afterlife or was thought of as being imposed in virtue of one's conduct throughout one's entire life, the deterrent effect of the punishment would be greatly attenuated. But as the form of punishment is strengthened, so is its inhibitory influence on agents, and this is what makes necessary the strong interpretation of punishment in premise (4). Thus, if the punishment is expected to be the strongest possible, there would be little temptation to do wrong.

A second objection to this view will be considered, the first of which is drawn from the phenomenon of self-deception. Suppose that I believe that if I were to do wrong then I would be immediately punished. The possibility for wrong action would remain in such circumstances as long as self-deception was open to me. For example, I may deceive myself into thinking that the action I desire is not so bad after all and that therefore no punishment would ensue. Or I may, in the heat of the moment, prior to engaging in a wrongful act, believe that God would be lenient if I lapsed on this particular occasion. Such self-deception is unfortunately quite common in the actual world, where people often choose a course of action which they recognize on some level as being wrong, but represent the action to themselves in ways that exculpate them. It is difficult to say to what extent self-deception would be operative in a world in which we have a direct awareness of God as well as an awareness that God knows what we are thinking or doing. But it also difficult to see why this awareness of God would render it impossible (psychologically speaking) for us to deceive ourselves into thinking that a particular action is acceptable or will not be punished. However, the problem with this line of thought, as Robert McKim makes clear, is that in a world where punishment immediately followed wrongdoing, self-deception (with respect to the moral character of particular actions) would regularly be unmasked. And if we were familiar with the exposure of such self-deception, we would be less likely to engage in it.[73]

A second objection to the view that the immediate threat of punishment would remove the temptation to do wrong is based on a phenomenon in the neighbourhood of self-deception, viz., *akrasia* or weakness of will. Cases involving weakness of will are usually described as situations in which the agent freely or voluntarily pursues a particular course of action A rather than an alternative course of action B despite knowing that B is preferable to A. Of course, some follow Socrates in viewing the akrates as lacking knowledge, while others take akratic action to be compulsive or compelled, thus denying its apparently voluntary character. But this dispute is irrelevant for present purposes. The point here is that in a situation of epistemic

temptation to do that which is forbidden be quashed? Of course, if the punishment was deferred to the afterlife or was thought of as being imposed in virtue of one's conduct throughout one's entire life, the deterrent effect of the punishment would be greatly attenuated. But as the form of punishment is strengthened, so is its inhibitory influence on agents, and this is what makes necessary the strong interpretation of punishment in premise (4). Thus, if the punishment is expected to be the strongest possible, there would be little temptation to do wrong.

Three objections to this view will be considered, the first of which is drawn from the phenomenon of self-deception. Suppose that I believe that if I were to do wrong then I would be immediately punished. The possibility for wrong action would remain in such circumstances as long as self-deception was open to me. For example, I may deceive myself into thinking that the action I desire is not so bad after all and that therefore no punishment would ensue. Or I may, in the heat of the moment, prior to engaging in a wrongful act, believe that God would be lenient if I lapsed on this particular occasion. Such self-deception is unfortunately quite common in the actual world, where people often choose a course of action which they recognize on some level as being wrong, but represent the action to themselves in ways that exculpate them. It is difficult to say to what extent self-deception would be operative in a world in which we have a direct awareness of God as well as an awareness that God knows what we are thinking or doing. But it also difficult to see why this awareness of God would render it impossible (psychologically speaking) for us to deceive ourselves into thinking that a particular action is acceptable or will not be punished. However, the problem with this line of thought, as Robert McKim makes clear, is that in a world where punishment immediately followed wrongdoing, self-deception (with respect to the moral character of particular actions) would regularly be unmasked. And if we were familiar with the exposure of such self-deception, we would be less likely to engage in it.[73]

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immediacy with God in which the threat of punishment looms large, the possibility of akrasia (however this is understood) remains. Suppose, for instance, that one has an exceedingly strong but not irresistible desire to perform a particular action even though one has (and is aware that one has) good reason not to satisfy that desire, where this reason consists in the prospect of immediate punishment. In such circumstances, the (admittedly irrational) desire may be so forceful as to neutralize the threat of punishment, thus leading to the akratic action.[74] This, however, should not be construed as self-deception, for in this case the rational desire is trumped by the irrational one, as opposed to the irrational desire being creatively redescribed as a rational one. To be sure, a person who acts in such a way would be reckless or indifferent to their well-being. But what this indicates is that, for people who are highly risk-averse and have little regard for their well-being, the temptation to do wrong would not be reduced, and may in fact be increased, by the threat of punishment.

This objection, however, is not a fatal blow to premise (5). For it would take an unusual degree of depravity or wantonness to display the kind of akratic behaviour envisioned in this case. However, most people, most of the time would not be inclined to act in this way. It is safe to assume, in other words, that most of us would not find it easy to perform an action if we knew that it was wrong and we also knew that immediate punishment would be inflicted if a wrong action were to be performed. Perhaps this necessitates a reformulation of (5), so as to be applicable to most persons (or most persons, most of the time), but this would not be damaging to Swinburne's argument.

A third possible objection to (5) can be derived from moral ignorance. The point here is that to know that 'If I do something wrong, I will be punished' is not to know that 'If I do action A, I will be punished'. Consider, for example, cases where action A is in fact wrong but I am either uncertain as to whether it is wrong or I genuinely but mistakenly believe that it is right. In such circumstances, I would not be deterred from performing A by the knowledge that if I were to do something wrong, I would be immediately punished.[75] Swinburne's argument, however, also emerges unscathed from this objection. For as long as premise (5) is stated as the claim that, in the relevant circumstances, there would be little temptation to do *what one believes to be* wrong, the objection from moral ignorance can be circumvented.

Turning to the formulation of (5) in terms of the desire for divine approval and future well-being, if we expected divine disapproval and a miserable afterlife (or no afterlife at all) to be the consequences of a life lived in an immoral way, would the temptation to do wrong be seriously reduced? It

may be thought that, insofar as these consequences are only actualized at the terminus of one's earthly life, it is doubtful that they would reduce the appeal of temptation. For if the consequences of one's actions are pushed off into the distant future, their deterrent effect is greatly minimized. As Schellenberg points out, in such a scenario all manner of self-deception could creep in:

> I might convince myself that my bad actions would not be repeated tomorrow or the next day and that I would therefore not really fall out of favor with God by performing them. I might reason that God, having *made* me weak and subject to contrary desire, would understand and tolerate at any rate *some* departures from correct behaviour.[76]

Thus, deferring the consequences for wrongdoing till the afterlife would mitigate their coercive force. Against this view, Michael Murray argues that the magnitude of the consequences in question would render their temporal distance irrelevant. Murray writes:

> At least on the traditional Christian view, the punishment described in eternity is so great in magnitude and duration, viz., maximal and eternal, that the temporal distance suggested by the average human life span seems unlikely to mitigate the coercive force of the threat to any great degree.[77]

Murray adds that the coercive force of this threat is also not mitigated by the presumed temporal distance of its actualization because, for all we know, the threat might be actualized in the twinkling of an eye. To illustrate this, Murray has us consider the following scenario:

> A victim of an extortion attempt … is told, "If you fail to carry out the plan, we will kill you. You never know when – maybe when you least expect it. But sometime, one of us will hunt you down and finish you off." The victim here might assume that it will take them a long time to track him down and so he might refuse to comply. But since the recipient of this threat is unsure how long it will take for the threateners to find him, it is likely that a threat of this sort would nonetheless be coercive.[78]

Given the force, then, of the threat posed by the prospect of eternal damnation, merely delaying the carrying out of this threat for some unspecified time in the future would not suffice to mitigate its coercive character.

Murray's reply to Schellenberg, however, will only be convincing to those who are prepared to make the assumption that the existence of a

perfectly loving God is compatible with the eternal damnation of at least some of his creatures. This is an assumption I find morally repugnant, but an adequate defence of this view lies beyond the scope of the present work. Swinburne, interestingly, suggests that the fate of the wicked may be annihilation after bodily death.[79] But unlike the prospect of suffering (whether physically or in some other way) for eternity, the prospect of ceasing to exist after death is a much less forceful disincentive towards immoral behaviour (and, indeed, may function somewhat perversely as an incentive for some people).

I conclude, then, that premise (5) of Swinburne's argument, although not entirely free of problems, is in much better shape than premise (4). But even if all the problems I have outlined with his argument could be met, there remains an insurmountable difficulty, one which is related to my earlier critique of Hick's views on epistemic distance. For consider a world where the evidence for God's existence is sufficiently clear to render nonbelief culpable but not impossible, or a world in which 'God exists' strikes nearly all of us as an obvious or self-evident truth. There is little reason to think that these worlds would exhibit any harmful moral consequences of the kind identified by Swinburne as resulting from continuous intimate interaction with God. For in such worlds, in comparison with one in which God's presence is constantly manifest to us, it would be easier to doubt (or ignore, or be indifferent towards, or deceive ourselves about, etc) the presence of God and thus to doubt (or ignore, etc) the prudential reasons adumbrated by Swinburne for not doing wrong. As a result, the appeal of temptation would not be greatly affected, if it is affected at all.[80]

4   IN CONCLUSION

Rowe's evidential case for atheism need not be predicated on a simple but admittedly difficult to defend version of RNA, according to which epistemic access to the content of God's reasons for permitting evil is only to be expected. Rather, Rowe may employ a more sophisticated and plausible noseeum assumption such as that expressed by RNA_4, which states that if the content of the relevant God-justifying goods is beyond our ken then it is to be expected that we would know that such goods do exist (or at least we would not be led to believe that there are no such goods). At least one way for God to impart to us the knowledge that there is some purpose served by suffering is for him to make his existence or love and concern sufficiently clear to us. In short, if (as sceptical theists contend)

there is divine hiddenness on level 1, then we would not expect there to be divine hiddenness on level 2. A degree of initial support for this position was generated by means of certain analogies between the Divine-human relationship and some of the relationships we form amongst ourselves. I then subjected RNA_4 to two prominent lines of criticism, the first of which is an offshoot of sceptical theism, holding that divine hiddenness on level 2, just as on level 1, may well serve some good that lies beyond our ken. This response to RNA_4, however, merely inherits and amplifies the implausibility of the sceptical theist position. Next I considered two objections to RNA_4 derived from the free will theodicy: John Hick's view that epistemic distance makes possible a freely entered personal relationship with God, and Richard Swinburne's claim that if placed in epistemic immediacy with God we would lose our freedom to choose between morally good and evil courses of action. However, both of these responses to RNA_4 were found to be defective, for they do not seriously consider the possibility of arriving at knowledge of God's existence through means other than an overwhelming and continuous experience of God's presence. In short, the case in favour of RNA_4 has not been defeated by the objections considered here.[81]

The theist, therefore, seems to be placed in an unenviable position in relation to Rowe's evidential case. The criticisms of Rowe's noseeum inference from inscrutable to pointless evil as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 were aimed against RNA_1, but proved to be ineffective. However, even if these criticisms turned out to be successful, they would have no bearing on noseeum inferences that presuppose something like RNA_4. And as we have seen in the present chapter, RNA_4 displays an even greater degree of cogency than its predecessor, RNA_1. It may be concluded, then, that if Rowe's evidential argument from evil is indeed flawed, the flaws are unlikely to reside in the underlying noseeum assumption employed by the argument. The critic of Rowe's case must look elsewhere.[82]

NOTES

[1]   See Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Seeing through CORNEA," pp. 41–42.

[2]   It may be noted, however, that a commitment to any of these alternatives to RNA_1 alters the nature of Rowe's noseeum inference so that it becomes something like the following: (P^*) We are not aware that a God-justifying good of an inscrutable nature is served by $E1$ and $E2$; therefore, (Q^*) There is no God-justifying good of an inscrutable nature served by $E1$ and $E2$. From this version of (Q), together with the claim that no good within our ken

justifies God in permitting the relevant evils, one can infer 'the factual premise' of Rowe's argument. Thus, this alteration in the noseeum inference is of no significance to Rowe's case. One further note: the 'we' in RNA_2, RNA_3, and (P^*) should be taken to refer to every (or nearly every) intellectually-able person who inquires into the matter of why evil is permitted by God.

3   Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., p. 102, emphasis his.

4   *Ibid*., p. 103.

5   *Ibid*.

6   Rowe puts the parent analogy to similar use in "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 276, "God and Evil," p. 8, "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," pp. 298–300, and "Grounds for Belief Aside," pp. 130–31. A similar analogy is suggested by Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 305–06.

7   Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 18, emphasis his.

8   Schellenberg, "What the Hiddenness of God Reveals: A Collaborative Discussion," in D. Howard-Snyder and P.K. Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 41, emphases his.

9   Schellenberg discusses these and other benefits in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 19–21. Cf. Robert McKim's list of disadvantages of God's hiddenness, each of which corresponds to an advantage or benefit that would accrue if God were not hidden (*Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 12–14).

10   Schellenberg, "What the Hiddenness of God Reveals," p. 44, emphases his; cf. *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 28–29.

11   Cf. Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, pp. 202–05. See also Schellenberg's recent paper on this topic, "Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism" (in Michael Peterson and Raymond VanArragon (eds), *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Religion*, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 30–41), where he defends the analogy between divine love and human love at its best as part of a 'Conceptual Argument' intended to provide a proper understanding of the concept of divine love (pp. 39–41). Also in this paper, Schellenberg defends an 'Analogy Argument' (pp. 31–39) similar to Rowe's argument based on the good-parent analogy.

12   Alston, "Some (Temporarily) Final Thoughts on Evidential Arguments from Evil," p. 321.

13   See Bergmann, "Skeptical Theism and Rowe's New Evidential Argument from Evil," pp. 282–83. The sceptical theist response to RNA_4 is also supported by Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Review of J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*," *Mind* 104 (1995): 432, "The Argument from Divine Hiddenness," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 26 (1996): 453, and (with Michael Bergmann) "Grounds for Belief in God Aside," pp. 151–52; Larry Lacy, "Review of J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 40 (1996): 123–24; Robert McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 87–91; Laura Garcia, "St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness," in Howard-Snyder and Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness*, pp. 85–86; and Paul Moser, "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," in Howard-Snyder and Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness*, pp. 135, 139, 146.

14   A different, and indeed unique, argument in support of sceptical theism with respect to divine hiddenness is provided by Robert McKim, according to whom:

It might be essential to the hiddenness of God that we not see precisely which goods are served by God's being hidden. The idea is that if we could see precisely which goods were

achieved by God's being hidden, then, in effect, God would not be hidden at all. (*Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 89.)

This view consists of two parts. Firstly, it is held that God must be hidden for the sake of certain goods, say G_1–G_4. Secondly, it is held that the goods in question, G_1–G_4, must be unknown to us, otherwise God (or God's existence) could not be hidden. However, this second component in McKim's position seems dubious. For how could the removal of our ignorance with respect to the content of G_1–G_4 make it obvious to us that there is a God?

[15]   Rowe, "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," pp. 300–01.

[16]   This, in fact, is done so by Schellenberg in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 90 (though his concern is with divine hiddenness as represented by the phenomenon of inculpable nonbelief). For a response to Schellenberg's argument, based partly on a rejection of the relevant SCR-like principle, see Robert McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 89.

[17]   See Rowe, "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," pp. 301–02.

[18]   Rowe adds that from 2 it also follows that "God is unable to enable the sufferers to understand good2 without thereby having to forfeit some other yet greater good, and so on, and so on," a point which he reiterates with respect to 4 – see fns 10 and 11 in Rowe's "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," p. 303. It is not clear, however, that the sceptical theist is committed to the view that good2 and good4 are beyond our ken. It is open to the sceptical theist to claim, for instance, that good1 may be so complex that it cannot be made comprehensible to humans without forfeiting the good2 of actualizing epistemically finite creatures.

[19]   The inherent implausibility of the above set of propositions is emphasized by Rowe a number of times on p. 302 of his "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann."

[20]   The implausibility of sceptical theism when applied to divine hiddenness may explain why some sceptical theists have preferred theodicies of one sort or another in order to account for God's hiddenness – see, for example, Daniel Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §30, pp. 173–75, and "The Argument from Divine Hiddenness," pp. 440–48.

[21]   Klaas Kraay, however, objects that Rowe's judgment of inherent implausibility is a "conversation-stopper, because if the theist fails to *just see* this (allegedly) inherent implausibility, no arguments can be offered to help her see it" (*Possible Worlds and the Problem of Evil*, PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2002, p.165, emphasis his). But perhaps Rowe ought to be interpreted as holding that sceptical theism, by adding propositions 2, 3, and 4 to proposition 1, becomes a highly complex and hence inherently implausible theory. This, of course, assumes that simplicity is a guide to truth, a view challenged in Section 5.3.1 of Chapter 5.

[22]   Rowe, "Skeptical Theism: A Response to Bergmann," p. 298.

[23]   Two further objections to the inscrutable goods defence, one more promising than the other, may be noted here. First, Schellenberg has argued that, if we "suppose that it is as likely as not … that if there is a God, at any rate some evils of human experience serve inscrutable goods," then the probability that reasonable nonbelief is a member of the 'inscrutable class' would be half of the first probability, thus giving it an overall probability of 0.25, which is "clearly too low for rational acceptance" (Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 90–91; a similar argument has been put forward by Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, pp. 211–14). Critics, however, have picked up on Schellenberg's initial probability assignment, which would be unpalatable to some sceptical theists. See Laura Garcia, "St. John of the Cross and the Necessity of Divine Hiddenness,"

pp. 85–86, and Jonathan Kvanvig, "Divine Hiddenness: What Is the Problem?" in Howard-Snyder and Moses (eds), *Divine Hiddenness*, p. 156.

Second, Robert McKim insightfully points out that "just as there may be unknown goods among the goods of mystery ('the goods of mystery' being the goods served by divine hiddenness), there may also be unknown goods among the goods of clarity" (*Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 89). This seems to neutralize the sceptical theist response to the problem of divine hiddenness. For if religious ambiguity is taken to be necessary for the actualization of some unknown goods, then religious clarity may also be taken to be necessary for some unknown goods – there would therefore be just as much reason to expect clarity as there would be to expect ambiguity. To be sure, a similar objection could be raised against the sceptical theist response to the evidential problem of evil. For just as unknown goods may well be served by horrendous evil, it seems equally likely that unknown *evils* are served by such cases of evil.

24   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1977), pp. 372–73, emphasis his. This exact passage also occurs in Hick's "Coherence and the God of Love Again," *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (1973): 523.

25   Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966 [first edition published 1957]), p. 133.

26   See Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 2nd ed., pp. 133–48. As far as I can tell, Hick first employed the term 'epistemic distance' in "Sceptics and Believers," in Hick (ed.), *Faith and the Philosophers* (London: Macmillan, 1964), p. 248.

27   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966), p. 317.

28   Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, 1st ed. (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1981), p. 43.

29   *Ibid*.

30   Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), p. 44. In his more recent book, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999, p. 38), Hick applies the notion of epistemic distance to non-theistic conceptions of ultimate reality.

31   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed., p. 317. Essentially the same justification of level-2 divine hiddenness is given by Daniel Howard-Snyder, *Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §30, pp. 173–75.

32   It almost goes without saying that the notion of freedom in all three varieties of epistemic distance is to be thought of in libertarian terms (this, it may be pointed out, is in accord with Hick's conception of freedom as expounded in *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st. ed., pp. 311–13). It may also be pointed out that in discussing the question of whether epistemic distance is necessary for freedom of a certain sort, it must not be overlooked that it remains to be asked whether this freedom is worth the price. Perhaps the benefits of epistemic immediacy outweigh the good of freedom that epistemic distance makes possible. For a defence of this view, see Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, pp. 130–33.

33   Drange, "The Argument from Non-Belief," *Religious Studies* 29 (1993): 427, emphasis his. By the time of writing *Nonbelief and Evil*, however, Drange had slightly modified his view on this issue. He argues there that an indirectly willed belief may be rational as long as it accords with "the investigation model". This model applies "whenever we make choices regarding which propositions to consider and to try to verify or falsify, and how strenuously such attempts are to be pursued" (p. 336). To borrow an example he employs, by an act of will I choose to read Plato's *Republic* rather than his *Protagoras*, thereby indirectly acquiring through an act of will the belief that 'Plato was critical of

Athenian democracy'. Perhaps in some cases, then, one's beliefs may be indirectly willed in an epistemically responsible way.

³⁴ This objection aside, a further difficulty with ED₁ is that, even if there were available a clear case for God's existence by way of a sound argument, it would still be possible to refuse to accept the existence of God. As Terence Penelhum observes, "facts which proved [God's] existence, where this is understood to mean merely that they entailed it or made it overwhelmingly probable, so that disbelief was thereby shown to be irrational, … do not compel assent … because men are irrational and do deceive themselves" – Penelhum, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (London: Macmillan, 1971), p.47; cf. Penelhum's *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1983), pp. 98–99, and *Reason and Religious Faith* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), pp. 58–60. Similarly, Howard-Snyder writes: "A sort of *intellectual machismo* that prides itself in being tough-minded, refusing to believe, much less trust in, what it cannot understand might well motivate a person to fail to believe that God exists even if He revealed Himself unambiguously to her" (*Inscrutable Evil and the Silence of God*, §31, p. 178, emphasis his). However, as McKim has pointed out, in the cases in question one may be able to choose not to believe, but one's capacity *to* believe would be removed, or at least significantly diminished – see McKim, "The Hiddenness of God," *Religious Studies* 26 (1990): 151–52, and *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 56–57.

³⁵ McKim thus mistakenly holds that Hick subscribes to the view that "if it were clear that God exists, a choice about whether or not to believe could not be made" ("The Hiddenness of God," p. 150; cf. McKim's *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 50). The only textual evidence produced by McKim is a passage where Hick states that, "Perhaps [God] has deliberately created an ambiguous world for us just in order that we shall *not* be compelled to be conscious of him" (the quote is taken from *Christianity at the Centre*, London: Macmillan, 1968, p. 56, emphasis Hick's). In referring to our consciousness of God, however, Hick is not merely referring to the belief that there is a God, but is rather pointing to an awareness of God "as the One who makes a total difference for us", an awareness that inevitably leads to faith: "I cannot know that such a Being exists and be at the same time indifferent to him" (*Christianity at the Centre*, p. 56). This must not be confused with the view, to be criticized shortly, that mere intellectual assent is sufficient for faith.

³⁶ See Hick, "Introduction," in Hick (ed.), *The Existence of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), pp. 17–18, and "Faith and Coercion," *Philosophy* 42 (1967): 273.

³⁷ MacIntyre, "The Logical Status of Religious Belief," in Stephen Toulmin *et al*., *Metaphysical Beliefs: Three Essays* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 197; see also p. 209. MacIntyre repeated this view in *Difficulties in Christian Belief* (London: SCM Press, 1959), p. 77.

³⁸ Swinburne, *Faith and Reason* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 86. A similar misinterpretation of Hick is made by Anthony O'Hear, *Experience, Explanation and Faith: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 239, as well as by J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 106. Hick's penchant for describing the freedom made possible by epistemic distance as *cognitive* freedom may have contributed to the view that he endorses ED₁ – see Hick's "Faith and Coercion," p. 273, *Christianity at the Centre*, p. 65, and *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 160–62.

³⁹ See Hick, "Introduction," in Hick (ed.), *The Existence of God*, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Hick, "Faith and Coercion," p. 273. A similar view is expressed by Hick in "Faith, Evidence, Coercion Again," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 49 (1971): 80. Originally, however, Hick's

position was quite different: "There are indeed no logical demonstrations of God; and if there were they would remove the possibility of a free faith-response to him" ("Sceptics and Believers," p. 241).

[41]   See Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 110–12; McKim, "The Hiddenness of God," pp. 152–53, and *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 58–62; Penelhum, *God and Skepticism*, pp. 109–12; Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, pp. 126–27; and Frank Dilley, "Fool-Proof Proofs of God?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 8 (1977): 21–25. I think it would be true to say, however, that for many people it would be psychologically difficult to accept the belief that God exists while at the same time not viewing this belief as a significant part of their life. But it is also only too common to find people who believe that God exists but who attach little weight to this belief or fail to respond to it in some religiously appropriate way. As Dilley humorously points out, if God were to reveal his existence to Bertrand Russell, "we would certainly find it difficult to imagine that Russell would 'become religious' in the conventional sense. It would be much more characteristic for him to join the underdog, Satan, than to renounce himself as sinful and unclean, declare that there is no health in him, and the like" ("Fool-Proof Proofs of God?" p. 22).

[42]   Hick, *The Fifth Dimension*, p. 38.

[43]   Hick, "Reply [to William Rowe]," in H. Hewitt Jr (ed.), *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 134.

[44]   Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6 (1975): 7.

[45]   Geivett, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), p. 36. Also guilty of the same interpretational error are Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, pp. 430–31, and J.L. Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 105–07.

[46]   It must be admitted, however, that Hick appears to endorse ED_2 in an important section of *Evil and the God of Love*, where he argues that the doctrine of the Fall would be unintelligible if it involved finite beings willfully falling into sin whilst dwelling in the immediate presence of God:

> When we think of a created being … living face to face with infinite plenitude of being, limitlessly dynamic life and power, and unfathomable goodness and love, there seems to be an absurdity in the idea of his seeing rebellion as a possibility, and hence in its even constituting a temptation to him. Surely his state would be that defined by Augustine as one of *non posse peccare* – not able to sin. (*Evil and the God of Love*, 1st. ed., p. 314.)

Interestingly, in "Faith, Evidence, Coercion Again" (pp. 80–81), Hick refers to this passage in order to draw attention to the implications of human beings coming into existence in full consciousness of the divine reality.

[47]   Rowe, "Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil," in Hewitt (ed.), *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 116.

[48]   Cf. Hick's "Reply [to William Rowe]," in Hewitt (ed.), *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, p. 134.

[49]   The outline of Schellenberg's critique that follows is drawn from his *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 47–57, 112–15, and "What the Hiddenness of God Reveals," pp. 37–39. A response to Hick similar to Schellenberg's is offered by Paul Moser, "Cognitive Idolatry and Divine Hiding," pp. 133–34, and by Terence Penelhum, "Reflections on the Ambiguity of the World," in A. Sharma (ed.), *God, Truth and Reality: Essays in Honour of John Hick* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p. 172.

50 Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 48–49, emphasis his.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

52 To avoid a possible misunderstanding, I should point out that I am not relying here on the assumption that 'God exists' is a necessary truth. Rather, I am proposing that we could have been created in such a way that we had the same (direct or immediate) kind of epistemic access to the truth of theism that we currently have to necessary truths such as '2 + 2 = 4'.

53 For a proposal similar to this, see C. Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 28–29. A further means, not involving any direct experience of God, by which the existence of God could be made evident to all would consist of dramatic and unambiguous theophanies and/or miracles – consider, for example, Cleanthes' suggestion at the beginning of Part III in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell (London: Penguin, 1990 [originally published 1779]), p. 63. Against such proposals, Swinburne has argued that in a world in which there was no ignorance regarding the existence (and nature) of God, people would be deprived of the very great good of helping each other find out whether there is a God (*Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 210–12). But assuming that the good of searching for God is an instrumental good, making possible goods such as co-operative inquiry and the cultivation of a critical or analytical mind, there would be innumerable opportunities for these further goods to be actualized, even if we were never required to investigate the existence of God.

54 Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 212; see also pp. 155–60.

55 Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," in W.J. Abraham and S.W. Holtzer (eds), *The Rationality of Religious Belief: Essays in Honour of Basil Mitchell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 157–58. Swinburne, of course, is not alone in his defence of ED_2 – at least one notable precursor of his views is Immanuel Kant. For insightful discussions of Kant's take on this topic, see McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 29–34, and Douglas Drabkin, "The Moralist's Fear of Knowledge of God," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 82–91.

56 Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 210. The quote is taken from G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware (eds and trans.), *The Philokalia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), vol. 1, p. 28.

57 McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 35–36.

58 My formulation of Swinburne's argument follows that provided by Schellenberg in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 121.

59 Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 159.

60 See Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 203–10. See also the recently published second edition of Swinburne's *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 267–72, where Swinburne provides a brief but clear summary his response to the problem of divine hiddenness.

61 See Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 126.

62 Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 206. Swinburne also advanced this position in his earlier book, *Is There a God?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 108.

63 Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 209.

64 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. 208–09.

66 Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 212.

67 See Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 125.

[68]   McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 43–44.

[69]   Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 123.

[70]   *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[71]   Schellenberg comes close to acknowledging this in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 127. See also McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p.44.

[72]   I am indebted here to McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 46. Schellenberg has also noted that, in a world that is not religiously ambiguous, "individuals would face a new challenge, and new choices: they would have the opportunity to grow *beyond* the purely self-interested motives, and to cultivate a love of the good for its own sake" ("The Hiddenness Argument Revisited (II)," *Religious Studies* 41 (2005): 294, emphasis in the original).

[73]   See McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 38.

[74]   Schellenberg also appeals to cases of this sort in criticism of Swinburne's premise (5) – see Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 123.

[75]   McKim makes mention of this possible objection in *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, p. 42.

[76]   Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, p. 128, emphases his (cf. p. 124). This position, however, would be unavailable if divine disapproval were actualized in the here and now. In this case, as in the case of immediate divine punishment, one may appeal to such factors as self-deception, akrasia, and moral ignorance as reasons why our bad desires would not be overwhelmed. However, the criticisms made earlier against such an appeal would retain their validity here.

[77]   Murray, "Deus Absconditus," in Howard-Snyder and Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness*, p. 75. Murray also defends this view in "Coercion and the Hiddenness of God," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 33–34.

[78]   Murray, "Deus Absconditus," p. 75.

[79]   See Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 196–201. Cf. Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in A. Freddoso (ed.), *The Existence and Nature of God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 51–52, where Swinburne rejects the view that the wicked are subject to endless physical pain in the afterlife.

[80]   This, of course, is Schellenberg's general line of response to Swinburne (see Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, pp. 121–23), which is also advocated by Robert McKim – see his *Religious Ambiguty and Religious Diversity*, pp. 42, 48). Although Swinburne is not oblivious to this line of criticism, he appears to struggle to overcome it (see *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 207). Michael Murray, on the other hand, has responded that we need not know with *certainty* that a threat will be carried out in order for the threat to be coercive. He offers the example of someone approaching me late at night and sticking (what feels like) a cylindrical object in my back, and then demanding that I hand over my money or be shot. Murray notes that "even if I thought there was only a .5 probability that the mugger would carry through on his threat, *I* would be coerced into handing over the money" ("Deus Absconditus," p. 73, emphasis his). In this example, however, the existence of the mugger is beyond doubt, whereas God's existence would not be beyond doubt (at least in the same way) in a world in which the evidence for his existence was not overwhelming but only sufficient to sustain reasonable belief.

[81]   There are, to be sure, many other criticisms of RNA$_4$ not considered here. In particular, a variety of goods apart from free will have been proposed as being made possible by

divine silence. According to Pascal, for example, God must be hidden so that we may recognize the wretchedness of life on our own, thus prompting us to search for God with due contrition and humility. Alternatively, there is the Kierkegaardian idea that divine hiddenness is necessary for the sense of risk required for a passionate faith. These and other alleged goods of divine silence receive detailed treatment by Schellenberg, *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*, chs 6 and 7, and McKim, *Religious Ambiguity and Religious Diversity*, pp. 73–87.

[82]   The results of this chapter have the further effect of providing support for a different kind of atheological argument. For the case developed above in support of RNA$_4$ can also be used to defend the view that a perfectly loving God would make his existence and love for us significantly clear. But if we also hold that the existence of God is not in fact clear to a considerable degree to a large proportion of human beings, it follows that no perfectly loving God exists. This, of course, is the gist of Schellenberg's argument as presented in *Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason*.

What in me is dark
Illumine, what is low raise and support;
That to the heighth of this great argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.

<div align="right">(John Milton, Paradise Lost, Book I, vv.22–26)</div>

And yet the problem of theodicy, far from being invented for the amusement of speculative minds, has strong and unwithering roots in the everyday experience of those who refuse to admit that suffering and evil are just suffering and evil, plain facts meaning nothing, related to nothing, justified by nothing.

<div align="right">(Leszek Kolakowski, Religion, p. 35)</div>

9. META-THEODICY: ADEQUACY CONDITIONS FOR THEODICY

The primary aim of the project of theodicy may be characterized in John Milton's celebrated words as the attempt to "justify the ways of God to men." That is to say, a theodicy aims to vindicate the justice or goodness of God in the face of the evil found in the world, and this it attempts to do by offering a reasonable explanation as to why God allows evil to abound in his creation. The construction of theodicies has often played a pivotal role in theistic religions, as believers continually seek to extract from the teachings of their faith glimpses of God's purposes for the sufferings and horrors they experience or observe. Indeed, developing a theodicy may be the most promising way to defuse evidential arguments from evil like Rowe's, and in the following two chapters I will consider the merits of such a response to Rowe's case for atheism. But before going on to consider whether any theodicy succeeds in providing a plausible theistic explanation of horrendous evil, it will be helpful to engage in the often neglected, but equally important, project of meta-theodicy. For without a clearly articulated meta-theodicy we will only be left with vague if not dubious standards by which to judge a theodical proposal.

Given that a theodicy attempts to explain the evils that riddle our world by appealing to a set of goods (or to some overarching good), a number of questions present themselves. For example, what evils, or how many evils, can we reasonably expect the theodicist to explain? And what goods can the theodicist legitimately invoke? Furthermore, what is it to explain an evil in terms of some good? It is by answering questions such as these that we arrive at a 'meta-theodicy', that is to say, a set of constraints or conditions that a theory must meet in order to count as a satisfactory or adequate theodicy.

1   THE EVILS TO BE EXPLAINED

What evils must any adequate theodicy explain? It may be helpful to fol-
low Rowe in distinguishing four levels of theodicy, each level attempting to
account for a separate and increasingly complex set of evils[1]:

Theodicy$_1$: seeks to explain why God permits *any evil* at all.
Theodicy$_2$: aims to explain why there are various *kinds* of evil we find
                 in our world (Rowe lists animal pain, human suffering, and
                 wickedness as distinct kinds of evil).
Theodicy$_3$: endeavours to explain why there is the *amount* of evil (or the
                 amount of a particular kind of evil) that we find in the world.
Theodicy$_4$: aims to explain certain *particular* evils that obtain.

Beginning with the first level, it is necessary to clarify what a Theodicy$_1$ pur-
ports to do. Such a theodicy may seek to explain why there is some evil rather
than none at all, or alternatively its function may be to account for at least one
evil.[2] On either interpretation, however, it may be thought that a Theodicy$_1$ is
the least difficult type of theodicy to provide.[3] But it is far from obvious that
the construction of such a theodicy will not pose any significant challenges.
Take, for example, the view that a world completely devoid of evil would pre-
clude the knowledge and appreciation of various significant goods. But per-
haps the good can be known and appreciated in contrast not with evil but with
imaginative depictions of evil, or even in contrast with the neutral or the indif-
ferent. Consider also the view that at least some pain and suffering is neces-
sary in order to acquire and develop certain important virtues such as patience
and generosity. But these valuable character traits may only be *instrumentally*
valuable and so of no use in a world without evil. Finally, consider the view
that there are some intrinsically good states – such as being in a loving rela-
tionship with another person – that acquire greater value if they are freely cho-
sen, but that any world with (libertarian) freedom is likely to be one with
moral evil. Even here one would need to show that it was not within God's
power to create a world where all free creatures always freely chose the good
over the bad. I do not mean to suggest that none of the foregoing theodical
claims can be shown to be plausible. Rather, the point is that the theodicist has
some work to do even when constructing something as seemingly simple as a
Theodicy$_1$.

Proceeding to the second level of the theodicy enterprise, this involves
explaining God's permission of various *kinds* of evil. To begin with, it is
instructive to ask how evil-kinds are to be individuated. There are at least two
ways in which instances of evil can be grouped together into kinds. First, we

may choose to slice evils into *broad* kinds. For example, evils may be differentiated according to the species that the sufferer belongs to (human suffering/animal suffering), or according to whether any human can be held responsible for causing the suffering (moral evil/natural evil), or according to the degree or qualitative character of the suffering involved ('mild' evils/horrendous evils). On the other hand, we may choose to carve evils into *narrower* kinds, such as the evils primarily caused by war, the evils of the twentieth century, murder, child abuse, etc.

Rowe's argument is clearly predicated on evil-kinds of a broad stripe, viz.:

(1) horrendous natural evil, and
(2) horrendous moral evil.

Given that Rowe's argument is the subject of our concern, it will be required of any Theodicy$_2$ that it at least accounts for God's permission of type-(1) and type-(2) evils. Although Rowe may also be thought of as arguing from narrower evil-kinds – $E2$, for example, is also an instance of child abuse – it is unreasonable, I think, to request a distinct explanation for such narrowly defined types of evil.[4]

A Theodicy$_2$, then, is an explanation as to why God permits evils of certain broadly defined kinds. This may be contrasted with Rowe's view, according to which a Theodicy$_2$ is one that explains how God would be justified in permitting an instance of each kind of evil to exist in our world.[5] On this view, if a theodicist$_2$ is concerned to refute Rowe's evidential argument, she would only be required to identify God-justifying goods for at least one instance of (1) and at least one instance of (2) – she could, of course, choose $E1$ and $E2$, but there are numerous other tokens available. This approach, however, does not appear satisfactory. For in requesting an explanation of God's permission of a certain evil-kind, we are asking why God permits a given *type* of evil, not why God permits *this* evil of that type. In other words, a Theodicy$_2$ seeks to show

(3) For every kind of evil, God is justified in allowing that evil-kind,

as opposed to

(4) For every kind of evil, God is justified in allowing at least one instance of it.

And to establish or provide some support for (3), one may adopt the following inductive procedure: Pick various instances $E_1 \ldots . E_{10}$ of an evil-kind EK,

perhaps giving preference to tokens that are representative of different kinds within EK; then identify the characteristics held in common by $E_1 \ldots E_{10}$; finally, offer an explanation as to why God permits states of affairs that bear those characteristics. Whether a successful theodicy of this sort can be developed is, for the time being at least, an open question, but to request one does not seem to be imposing too daunting a task.

Ascending further to Theodicy$_3$, this involves the attempt to explain why there is the *amount* of evil, or the amount of a particular kind of evil, that we find in the world. The quantity of evil is often taken to be the most troubling form of the problem of evil and thus the Achilles heel of many a theodicy. Rowe, for example, argues that Hick's soul-making theodicy, although adequate as a level-one and level-two theodicy, is ineffective in serving as a level-three theodicy on the grounds that the evil we see around us appears to be far in excess of that needed for the soul-making process.[6] In a similar vein, Jerome Weinstock points out that a theodicy cannot be considered successful unless it shows that it is reasonable to believe what he calls 'The Perfect Balance Thesis' (PBT):

> PBT: There is a perfect balance between that amount of evil that is necessary for the execution or achievement of God's purposes in allowing evil and the amount of evil that exists.

But Hick's theodicy, Weinstock goes on to argue, ought to be rejected as it does not manage to show that it is reasonable to believe PBT.[7] Given that evidential arguments from evil are often based on the amount of evil, particularly the amount of horrific evil, it will be necessary to demand of any satisfactory theodicy that it at least be a Theodicy$_3$. Applying this adequacy condition to Rowe's evidential argument, the theodicist is required to offer a rational explanation as to why there is as much evil of kinds (1) and (2) in the actual world as there is.[8]

Moving, finally, to a Theodicy$_4$, such a theodicy strives to identify a God-justifying good for any particular instance of evil, where a 'particular instance of evil' is to be understood as an actual and unique bad state of affairs occurring at a specific time and place (e.g., Rowe's $E2$). There lurks an important ambiguity here: Is a theodicist$_4$ attempting to explain (a) certain particular evils, or (b) every particular evil? To explain each and every particular evil would require knowledge not only of every evil that has occurred but also knowledge of the circumstances within which the evil event took place (e.g., the cultural context of the event, the psychological condition of any people involved, etc.) – and this is obviously impossible for any mere mortal. On the other hand, the theodicist$_4$ may only be required

to account for certain particular evils – this indeed is how Rowe construes the task of such a theodicist.[9]

Rowe, however, has indicated that the theist cannot reasonably be expected to provide a level four-type theodicy.[10] In that case, one may wonder why Rowe casts his evidential argument in terms of specific cases of evil. However, as pointed out in Section 1.3 of Chapter 3, Rowe can also be understood as arguing from the enormous *amount* of apparently pointless, horrendous suffering, with cases such as *E*1 and *E*2 serving merely as vivid examples of the kind of evil with which he is concerned. The question remains, however, why a theodicy of the fourth level – even when considered as the attempt to explain certain particular evils – is often thought to be unreasonably ambitious. One answer to this question is suggested by Daniel Howard-Snyder.

According to Howard-Snyder, to identify the reasons God might have for permitting *that* evil one is required to identify a number of different purposes God might have, with each divine purpose correlated to a distinct aspect of the demonstrative 'that'.[11] Consider, for example, Rowe's *E*2. To explain why God permits that evil, one must explain each of the following:

(a) why God permitted Sue to be raped and murdered *then and there*, rather than some other time and place;

(b) why God permitted *Sue*, rather than another equally undeserving child, to be raped and murdered; and

(c) why God permitted Sue to be *raped and murdered*, rather than suffer some other comparable sort of underserved horrific evil (e.g., being burned to death).

But surely such a detailed explanation as to why God permitted *E*2 is not only beyond our reach, but is not to be had at all. The facts represented by (a)–(c) appear to be brute facts. As Howard-Snyder points out, to deny this would be analogous to the belief that a scrupulous basketball coach would not only have good reason to allow his team to play and to suffer injuries, but would also have good reason to allow (i) his team to play *now* on *that* court, (ii) *Peter* (rather than Paul) to sprain his ankle, and (iii) Peter to *sprain his ankle* (as opposed to breaking his finger). Clearly, however, such a coach, no matter how scrupulous, cannot be expected to have any such reasons – and the same holds for God.[12]

But is Howard-Snyder correct? Let's suppose that at least one God-justifying good served by *E*2 is human free will. The offender in this case was the boyfriend of Sue's mother. Now consider the following hypothetical, but not too far-fetched, reconstruction of the events leading up to *E*2.

Over a number of years, the boyfriend voluntarily (but perhaps not entirely voluntarily) developed a character that is predisposed to impulsive, violent, and sexually deviant behaviour. On the night in question, he had been taking drugs and drinking heavily, and he became mad with jealousy upon seeing Sue's mother flirting with another man. Would a story such as this provide us with all the resources we require for explaining the facts represented by (a)–(c) above? In other words, does the boyfriend's desire to seek revenge against Sue's mother, his drug and alcohol-induced state, and his normally violent and perverse sexual desires put us in a position to see why he chose to cause harm (a) on New Year's Day in 1986, (b) to Sue, and (c) by way of rape and murder? Initially, it may seem doubtful that it does. One may think, for example, that (b) remains unaccounted for since no explanation is offered as to why the boyfriend did not choose to exact revenge by harming Sue's siblings (assuming she has some) or Sue's mother or the man she was flirting with.

This, however, is quite wrong. An adequate explanation for (b) need not be beyond our reach. One could appeal, for instance, to the assailant's sexually deviant nature to explain why he chose Sue over her mother. What lies behind the doubts expressed by Howard-Snyder is, I suspect, the common assumption that contrastive explanations (i.e., explanations why an agent did one thing rather than another, or why one event occurred rather than another) are simply unavailable for actions or events that are not causally determined. And what seems to motivate this assumption is the view that to explain anything, whether contrastively or not, is to cite an event or condition given which the outcome had to occur. But surely an explanation can be quite adequate even if it does not amount to a specification of sufficient causal antecedent conditions (a point I will return to in Chapter 10, Section 3.2). It is not, therefore, clearly impossible to provide contrastive explanations even for actions or events that are nondeterministically caused.

This, however, is all a bit beside the point with respect to the possibility of providing a Theodicy$_4$. For even if contrastive explanations are available, the prospects for providing an explanation as to why God permits some particular evil remain dim. The reason for this is that any explanation (in the form of a God-justifying reason) given for some particular evil will inevitably recapitulate the explanation offered for at least one of the major evil-kinds that subsumes the particular evil in question. This is why it seems unreasonable to request a reason (even a possible reason) for God's permission of a particular event that is specific to this event and that goes beyond some general policy or plan God might have for permitting events of that kind. Howard-Snyder, then, is correct in dismissing the project of constructing a Theodicy$_4$ as overly ambitious, but this has little to do with the

availability of contrastive explanations for specific evils. In conclusion, therefore, the theodicist need not go beyond level three.[13]

2   THE GOODS TO BE INVOKED

A theodicist attempts to explain God's permission of various evils by ascribing to God some reason for allowing the evils to take place. On a general level, the kind of reason that would be ascribed to God would be that God permits evil *E* for the sake of some good state of affairs *G*. But what sorts of goods may a theodicist invoke? This question can divided into a number of sub-questions.

First, must a theodicy propose goods that constitute God's *actual* reasons for permitting evil? Or would it suffice if the theodicist were to put forward some good state of affairs *G* and argue that *G* would justify God in permitting *E*? A theodicy of this latter kind only hopes to show that *if* the obtaining of *G* were God's aim in permitting evil *E*, then God would be justified in permitting *E*. It need not be the case, however, that *G* is God's actual reason for allowing *E*.

The standard view, one that I think is eminently reasonable, is that the former kind of theodicy is too demanding, for it requires knowledge of God's purposes, and it is unlikely that any such knowledge can be acquired without some detailed revelation to us from God. By contrast, the latter kind of theodicy has weaker but more reasonable expectations. Thus, Richard Swinburne, when developing a theodicy in *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, aims to provide "not an account of God's actual reasons for allowing a bad state to occur, but an account of his possible reasons (i.e. reasons which God has for allowing the bad state to occur, whether or not those are the ones which motivate him)."[14]

Second, the theodicist must propose goods that are in some sense greater than the evils they justify – but in what sense should they be considered 'greater'? At least one popular suggestion is the following:

(5) *G* is greater than *E* in the sense that *G* *outweighs E*.

But how are we to understand this 'outweighing' relation? Plantinga suggests the following answer:

(6) *G* outweighs *E* if and only if the conjunctive state of affairs *G and E* is a good state of affairs.[15]

However, as Rowe points out, this has the following unfortunate consequence.[16] Suppose a good *G* has a value of $+7$ and an evil *E* has a disvalue

of -5. We can then form a conjunctive state of affairs G_1 (G & E) that has a value of $+2$. But then G_1, and not just G, will outweigh E. For according to (6), G_1 outweighs E if and only if the conjunctive state of affairs G_2 (G_1 & E) is a good state of affairs. But the conjunctive state of affairs G_2 (G_1 & E) is equivalent to G_1, and thus is a good state of affairs.[17] Therefore, there is a good (viz., G_1) that has a value of $+2$ and that nevertheless outweighs an evil E that has a disvalue of $+5$.

To avoid this consequence, Rowe suggests that (6) be reformulated as follows:

> (6*) An evil E is outweighed if and only if there is a good G such that the conjunctive state of affairs G *and* E is a good state of affairs.

On this construal of 'outweighed', if E has a value of -5 and G has a value of $+7$, then E is outweighed – for there is a good G such that the conjunction (G & E), call it G_1, is a good state of affairs (as it has a value of $+2$). But, Rowe adds, "we need not say that G_1, whose value is $+2$, itself outweighs E, whose value is -5."[18]

Rowe's proposal, however, will not do. If E is outweighed, surely some good must be responsible for outweighing it. And if it is not G_1 that does the outweighing, then the only other candidate is G. This suggests that any revision of (6) ought to take one of the following forms:

> (6′) G outweighs E if and only if the positive value of G exceeds the negative disvalue of E.
> (6″) G outweighs E if and only if (a) (G & E) is good, and (b) G is better than (G & E).[19]

It seems that Plantinga and Rowe have been led astray by the assumption that, to say that G outweighs E is to say that a world with both G and E is of greater value than a world with E alone – but as the above two accounts make clear, this assumption is mistaken. On the first account, (6′), G outweighs E when G is more of a good state than E is a bad state. Thus, a G with a value of $+7$ would outweigh an E with a value of -5.[20] The second account (6″) is drawn from the work of Roderick Chisholm and states that, with respect to a whole composed of a good part and an evil part, the good part may be said to outweigh the evil part when (a) the whole is itself good, and (b) the good part is better than the whole. To adapt an example offered by Chisholm, consider the whole 'Robinson experiencing a certain amount of pain and Jones experiencing a greater amount of pleasure'. The good part (involving Jones' pleasure) clearly outweighs the bad part (involving Robinson's pain), and

this outweighing relation may be thought to hold in virtue of the following facts: (a) the whole is good inasmuch as the badness of one of its parts is outweighed by the goodness of another one of its parts, and (b) the whole, though good, is worse than one of its parts, viz., its good part.[21]

A good G may also be said to be greater than an evil E in a further way:

(7) G is greater than E in the sense that G *defeats* E.

Following Chisholm, the notion of defeat may be understood as follows:

(8) $(G \& E)$ defeats E if and only if:
   a. $(G \& E)$ is good, and
   b. $(G \& E)$ is better than E, and
   c. $(G \& E)$ is better than G.[22]

Take, for example, the state of affairs consisting of *the remorse and displeasure I experience when contemplating my wrongful act*. This state is composed of two parts, the first of which is my contemplation of my wrongful act (call this 'G') and the other is the remorse and displeasure I feel (call this 'E'). G, or the act of contemplation, is ethically neutral; on the other hand, E or the displeasure I experience, considered in and of itself, is bad. But when we conjoin G and E the result, as Chisholm notes, "is the virtuous activity of repentance."[23] Thus, the resulting whole is clearly good overall as well as better than E alone. But the whole is also better than G alone – that is to say, a world containing only G would increase in value if E were added to it. This implies, somewhat paradoxically, that a whole may be made better because of (rather than in spite of) a component that is bad. And so, when faced with a defeated evil one should, as Chisholm puts it, exclaim, " 'Thank goodness for the badness of the part that is bad!' For … the badness of the part that is bad makes the whole *better* than what we would have had had the bad part been replaced by its neutral negation."[24] In a case of outweighing, by contrast, the presence of the evil in a larger whole may be resented or regretted, for it is not necessarily the case that if G outweighs E, E was necessary for the attainment of G. In a case of defeat, however, the good part is organically related to the bad part, and so the former cannot be had without the latter.[25]

Apart from outweighing and defeating goods, can the theodicist also put forward *counterbalancing* goods? A 'counterbalancing good' may be thought of as follows:

(9) G counterbalances E if and only if the positive value of G is equal to the negative disvalue of E.

Thus, if the amount of goodness in one state of affairs is the same as the amount of badness in another state of affairs, then each state counterbalances the other, with the result that the total state of affairs is neutral in value.[26] Our earlier question may then be rephrased in the following manner: Would it be morally permissible for God to permit an evil to take place for the sake of a good that is not greater in value than that evil?

According to Rowe, we should not fault God for permitting E for the sake of G even if G is not greater than E *as long as* it is the case that the permission of E and G, in comparison with the prevention of E and thus the loss of G, does not alter the balance between good and evil in the world.[27] But perhaps we should add a further constraint: God may allow E for the sake of a counterbalancing good G only if there is no other good G' such that G' is greater in value than G and it is logically possible for God to have E outweighed or defeated by means of G'.

Even with these constraints, would it be reasonable for one to allow counterbalancing goods in their theodicy? Given that the permission of an evil for the sake of a counterbalancing good is a morally neutral action (i.e., it is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy), it may be thought that the performance of such actions is not compatible with the nature of a morally perfect God. Melville Stewart, for example, writes:

> Regarding the notion of *counterbalance* it is not clear to me that there are such things as morally neutral actions for God, at least as he has been pictured by theologians in the mainstream of Christian theism. It has generally been held that God is praiseworthy in everything that he does and allows because everything he does and allows manifests his moral goodness.[28]

But this view is open to the following response: If we say that God – in virtue of his perfect goodness – is not blameworthy in anything that he does (rather than that he is praiseworthy in everything he does), then God can perform actions that are morally neutral and thus morally permissible even though they are not praiseworthy. However, whether God's goodness is to be conceived of negatively (as a lack of blameworthiness) or positively (as the having of praiseworthiness) is a moot point. The best strategy, I suggest, is to err on the side of caution and permit counterbalancing goods. I will assume, therefore, that in some cases God may be a 'counterbalancer'.

Third, should patient-centred goods (i.e., goods that benefit the sufferer) have greater pre-eminence than non-patient-centred goods in a theodicy? Given the conclusions of Section 2 of Chapter 7, in cases involving intense, involuntary and underserved suffering at least one of the goods

secured by such suffering must be shared by the sufferer. This imposes a further important constraint on the set of goods that may be invoked by the theodicist: no non-patient-centred good will constitute a sufficient reason for God's permission of intense, involuntary and undeserved suffering.

However, an additional constraint with respect to such cases of suffering is required. God's goodness, as Marilyn McCord Adams has emphasized, must mean that he values the individual *qua* person, and this "would drive God to make all those sufferings which threaten to destroy the positive meaning of a person's life meaningful through positive defeat."[29] Thus, in cases of intense, involuntary and underserved suffering, the sufferer *S* must be, to borrow Alston's phrase, "amply taken care of."[30] Following Alston and Adams, this is to be understood not only in the sense that *S*'s suffering secures some good that benefits *S*. It must also be the case that (a) *S*'s life is a great good to her on the whole, and (b) *S* is put in a position that she will eventually come to recognize the truth of (a) or at least is given ample opportunity to put herself in this position.[31] As we move away, however, from instances of suffering that are not intense, involuntary or underserved, these constraints lose their applicability.

Fourth, the goods appealed to by the theodicist should be such that it would be morally permissible for God to permit the evil in question for the sake of these goods. Even if a particular evil *E* secures some greater or counterbalancing good *G*, it remains to be asked whether it is morally permissible for anyone, but particularly God, to bring about *G* by these means. This involves asking whether God has the right to allow us to suffer for certain ends, such as free will or soul-making. But it also involves asking whether the course of action embarked on by God is the best one, all things considered. For perhaps God could have secured *G* in a much less costly fashion. Or perhaps an alternative good equal to or greater than *G* could have been obtained by God if he had prevented *E*.[32]

Finally, how should the theodicist conceive of the relationship between the goods she invokes and the evils that these goods are intended to justify? Clearly, the relationship is one of necessity: when God's permission of an evil *E* is explained in terms of a good *G* this means, in part, that God's permission of *E* is necessary in order for *G* to obtain. The sense of necessity here cannot be merely causal, since God's power is not bound by causal laws. Rather, God's permission of *E* must be *logically* necessary for the realization of *G*.

Two further points may be made here. First, it may not be God's permission of the evil *E* itself, but rather God's permission of *either E or some other evil equally bad or worse*, that is necessary for the obtaining of the greater good *G*. It remains the case, however, that the key relationship – this

time between G and the disjunctive evil *either E or some evil equally bad or worse* – is to be expressed in terms of logical necessity. Second, God's permission of an evil E may be necessary not for the actualization of a greater good, but rather for the prevention of some other equally bad or worse evil. But even in this case the prevention of an equally bad or worse evil will itself be a greater (or at least counterbalancing) good.[33]

3   THE NATURE OF THEODICAL EXPLANATION

What kind of explanation must a theodicist strive to offer when attempting to explain God's permission of a certain evil in terms of some good? As a bare minimum, the explanation must not be merely logically possible, otherwise a theodicy would be indiscernible from a defence, as the latter has often been employed in response to the logical problem of evil. The primary aim of a defence – such as Plantinga's renowned free will defence – is to show that there is no formal inconsistency in accepting both the existence of God G and the existence of evil E (or certain kinds of evil, or particular instances of evil). To show that G and E are logically compatible it would suffice to propose a hypothesis H which is clearly compatible with G and whose conjunction with G entails E. The hypothesis H, however, may express nothing more than a logically possible state of affairs. As Plantinga makes clear, H

> need not be true, or probable, or plausible, or accepted by the scientists of our culture circle, or congenial to "man come of age," or anything of the sort: it need only to be such that its conjunction with $[G]$ is possible and entails $[E]$. $[H]$ can do its job perfectly well even if it is extraordinarily improbable or known to be false.[34]

However, a defence employed as a theodicy or as a solution to the evidential problem of evil would clearly be inadequate. Such a strategy may show that the alleged (logical) inconsistency between the existence of God and the existence of evil can be removed, but it would clearly fail to *explain* why God permits evil or to illuminate and make sense of our experience of evil from a theistic perspective.[35] This suggests that a theodical explanation must not only be an internally consistent story, but also one that is in some significant sense *reasonable* or *plausible*.

This adequacy condition, however, has come under fire by Peter van Inwagen. According to van Inwagen, the notion of a 'defence' may be imported into discussions of the evidential problem of evil. Specifically, he

argues that to refute evidential arguments from evil such as those forward by Rowe it would suffice to meet the following condition:

> One must tell a story that contains both God and vast amounts of horrendous evil and one must try to show that this story has the following feature: it is true for all anyone knows; or, at any rate, it is true, for all anyone knows, given that there is a God.[36]

Thus, a defence in the context of the evidential problem of evil need only be true 'for all anyone knows' – that is to say, it need only be epistemically possible. The purpose of a defence of this kind, van Inwagen adds, is not to show that one or more of the premises of an atheological evidential argument is false, but that one or more of its premises is open to reasonable doubt.[37] To use an analogy employed by van Inwagen, consider a historian's attempt to defend the character of Richard III in the face of seemingly compelling evidence that he murdered the two princes in the Tower of London. The historian may compose a story (which she does not claim to be true, or even more probable than not) that both accounts for the contrary evidence and entails that Richard was not responsible for the murders. As van Inwagen notes, "If my reaction to her [i.e., the historian's] story is, 'For all I know, that's true. I shouldn't be at all surprised if that's how things happened,' I shall be less willing to accept a negative evaluation of Richard's character than I might otherwise have been."[38] Similarly, if the theist can tell a story that might well be true and accounts for the sufferings of the actual world, then that would suffice to exonerate God.[39]

At least one problem with van Inwagen's proposal is its vagueness. A defence, of the van Inwagen variety, need only be epistemically possible or consistent with all that we know (and perhaps justifiably believe). But what exactly is it that 'we all know'? Part of the difficulty here resides in delimitating the range of 'we'. Given that van Inwagen never attempts to qualify his references to 'we' in 'all we know', it seems that he intends the 'we' to refer to both theists and nontheists. But the propositions held in common by all, or even most, theists and nontheists is, at best, restricted to relatively uncontroversial matters such as the reality of the external world (even on these matters, however, there are plenty of intelligent people who do not subscribe to such commonsensical views). This would mean that a range of quite implausible but epistemically possible explanations can be offered in relation to many evils. The appeal to the doctrine of the Fall or the appeal to the machinations of Satan and his minions would be just two of many epistemically possible theistic defences. But surely we should want to rule out such explanations, and to achieve this we may need to substantially enlarge the set of propositions that constitute our background knowledge.[40]

To this end, let us say that the content of 'all we know' includes or entails at least the following:

(a) commonsensical views about the world, including such items of belief as the belief in other minds and the belief in an external world, but also including our commonly held beliefs regarding the occurrence of various goods and evils in the world;

(b) widely accepted scientific and historical views (e.g., evolutionary theory); and

(c) intuitively plausible moral principles (e.g., generally, punishment should not be significantly disproportional to the offence committed).

If we demand of any explanation of God's permission of suffering that it be consistent with (a)–(c), then at least some palpably unsatisfactory explanations – such as those based on a literalist reading of the Fall – can be ruled out.[41] It may indeed have been van Inwagen's view all along that a defence must be epistemically possible in the sense that it be consistent with (a)–(c) and theism.[42] Even such a defence, however, would not be an adequate response to Rowe-like evidential arguments. To see this, consider van Inwagen's proposal of vindicating Richard III's character by means of a defensive story. Such a story would be true 'for all anyone knows' and would entail that Richard did not murder the two princes. The problem with such a defensive strategy is that it exhibits, as Richard Gale puts it, "epistemic laxness" in that it embodies an unacceptably low standard of proof or confirmation.[43] This is evidenced by the fact that a van Inwagen defence of Richard III can always be defeated by means of a counterdefence, that is, a story that is also true for all we know but entails that Richard *did* murder the princes. Given such a counterdefence, we should be just as willing to accept a negative evaluation of Richard's character as we would have been prior to considering any of these stories.[44]

Or consider the phenomenon of 'cosmic silence' – the absence of any sign or evidence of intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. Despite our best efforts, projects such as SETI (the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence) have failed to detect any manifestations of intelligent life. How are we to account for this seemingly extraordinary fact? Following van Inwagen's lead, a 'noetist' (i.e., someone who believes that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe) may advance an explanation for cosmic silence that runs as follows:

Intelligent life-forms existing on other planets in the universe have not contacted us because, firstly, they do not possess the technology that

would be required to contact us, and secondly, they do not have the desire to communicate with life on other planets.

Such an explanation, the noetist may add, is true for all we know and, of course, entails that there is intelligent extra-terrestrial life. This defensive strategy, however, faces an intractable problem. Consider the following counterdefence, which we may call the Hypothesis of Isolation:

> The human species is the only intelligent species that exists or has ever existed in the universe.

This hypothesis is also true for all we know and it explains the fact of cosmic silence just as well as the defence concocted by the noetist, but it entails that there is *no* intelligent life elsewhere in the universe. The availability of such a counterdefence undercuts any credibility the noetist's defence may have enjoyed. What is required, therefore, is a 'noödicy' – that is to say, some reason for thinking that the noetist's story is (given our set of background beliefs) likely to be true.[45] Thus, a further requirement may be imposed on any explanation of God's permission of evil:

> Given the truth of theism and (a)–(c), there is either good reason to believe the story (as to why God permits evil) to be true or there is no good reason to believe the story to be false.

Put differently, the existence of God in conjunction with (a)–(c) must either render the story more likely than not, or not render it less likely than not.[46] We must seek an account that is in this respect *plausible* or *reasonable*. Such an account, however, is better thought of as a theodicy rather than a defence.

The requirement of plausibility or reasonability may also be thought of as an adequacy condition for the particular goods postulated by any theodicy. For if a theodicy is to be plausible or reasonable in the above-mentioned senses, then the goods identified by the theodicy must be such that we have no good reason to believe that they do not (or will not) obtain. To borrow an example given by Rowe, if the theodicist were to argue that *Each person turning to Christ before experiencing bodily death* is one of the goods served by human suffering then the plausibility of the theodicy in question would be greatly diminished, as we have very good reason to think the aforementioned good does not obtain.[47]

Does this mean, however, that the theodicist must be able to establish that the relevant goods do in fact obtain? Rowe thinks not. He suggests that

there are certain goods – such as *The experience of complete felicity in the everlasting presence of God* – which are such that we do not know whether they will ever obtain. Nevertheless, the theodicist may legitimately appeal to such goods. To be sure, the relevant goods must at some point be actualized if they are to justify God's permission of evil, but the theodicist need not be able to establish this.[48] But is Rowe's view correct? A theodicy obviously draws on the resources of theism (whether it be a narrow form of theism such as RST or an expanded form of theism such as Christianity) in order to account for God's permission of evil. Clearly, the plausibility of a theodicy is increased if the actualization of the goods it postulates is not merely not excluded by the truth of theism but is also rendered likely by the truth of theism. It does not seem unduly demanding, however, to require of any theodicy that the goods it postulates would likely obtain if theism were true. Indeed, the good of the experience of God in a heavenly afterlife is such a good, for it seems likely that such a good would be actualized if theism were true. It is not unreasonable, therefore, to expect the theodicist to only postulate those goods that are likely to be realized.[49]

4   SUMMARY

   In sum, then, a theodicy *T* must meet at least the following conditions in order to pass as an adequate refutation of the factual premise of Rowe's evidential argument from evil:

(10) *T* must cover the first three levels of theodicy – that is, *T* must explain God's permission of:
   (a) *any evil* at all (Theodicy$_1$);
   (b) *certain kinds* of evil, viz., horrendous moral evil and horrendous natural evil, (Theodicy$_2$); and
   (c) the *amount* of horrendous moral and natural evil found in the world (Theodicy$_3$).
(11) With respect to each evil *E* specified in (10) above, *T* must specify some good state of affairs *G* such that:
   (a) *G* constitutes a *possible reason* for God's permission of *E* in the sense that, if the obtaining of *G* were God's aim in permitting *E* then God would be morally justified in permitting *E*;
   (b) *G* is *greater* than *E* in that either *G* outweighs *E* or *G* defeats *E*, or (in certain cases only) *G counterbalances E*;
   (c) *G* is, at least in part, a *patient-centred* good (only when *E* involves intense, involuntary and undeserved suffering);

     (d) it is *morally permissible* for God to bring about *G* by means of *E*; and

     (e) God's permission of *E* (or some other evil equally bad or worse) is *logically necessary* for *G*.

(12) *T* is *reasonable* or *plausible* – that is, *T* is such that:

     (a) *T* expresses a logically possible state of affairs;

     (b) given the truth of theism in conjunction with certain background information (e.g., widely shared scientific theories), there is good reason to believe that *T* is true, or at least no good reason to think that *T* is false; and

     (c) there is good reason to believe that, assuming the truth of theism, the goods identified by *T* do (or will) obtain.

NOTES

[1]   Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 131; cf. Rowe, "Paradox and Promise: Hick's Solution to the Problem of Evil," p. 112.

[2]   Rowe seems to have intended the latter interpretation, for he notes that the problem of explaining why God permits any evil at all can be solved "by explaining how such a being would be justified in permitting just one instance of the evils that exists in our world" ("Paradox and Promise," p. 112).

[3]   Rowe himself assumes this by characterizing each level of theodicy as "more difficult than its predecessor" ("Evil and Theodicy," p. 131).

[4]   The reason for this is that any theodical explanation for some narrow evil-kind K1 is likely to merely recapitulate the theodical explanation given for some broader evil-kind K2 which subsumes K1.

[5]   See Rowe, "Paradox and Promise," p. 112.

[6]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 126–31, "Paradox and Promise," pp. 117–22, "John Hick's Contribution to the Philosophy of Religion," pp. 19–21, "God and Evil," pp. 10–12, and *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., pp. 104–06.

[7]   Weinstock, "What Theodicies Must, But Do Not, Do," *Philosophia* 4 (1974): 449–67.

[8]   There are, to be sure, various connections between the different levels of theodicy. As Edward Martin has pointed out, a level-two theodicy may bear significantly on a level-three theodicy. For if a certain kind of evil (say, child abuse) leads one to think that the amount of evil in the world is excessive, then an explanation for why God allows evils of that kind would remove one's grounds for believing that there are excess evils. See Martin, *The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy* (PhD dissertation, Purdue University, 1995), pp. 172–73.

[9]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 131, and "Paradox and Promise," p. 112.

[10]   Specifically, Rowe writes: "Theodicies, one might argue, are not intended to provide a justification for *particular evils*. I acknowledge the merit of this criticism" ("Evil and Theodicy," p. 131, emphasis his). But perhaps Rowe did not mean to agree with this criticism – this, at least, would explain why he continued to object to Hick's theodicy on the grounds that it fails to adequately

account for certain particular evils (see, for example, Rowe, "Paradox and Promise," p. 122). Cf. William Alston's dim view of level-four theodicies: "Even if we were vouchsafed an abundance of divine revelations I cannot conceive of our being able to specify God's reason for permitting each individual evil. The most that could be [sic] sensibly be aimed at would be an account of the sorts of reasons God has for various sorts of evil" ("The Inductive Argument from Evil," p. 61, fn. 3). A view parallel to Alston's is endorsed by Ronald Nash: "Some theists suggest that perhaps no human can really know God's reasons for permitting moral and natural evil in general … I part company with theists in this group and side with those who believe we can detect at least the broad outlines of an answer. But when we turn to specific instances of evil, I think the wise theist will admit his ignorance" (*Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988, p. 198, fn. 7). At least one "wise theist" who refuses to concede any such ignorance is Richard Swinburne – he describes the overall aim of his book *Providence and the Problem of Evil* thus: "I am certainly committed to, and sought to argue for, the strong version of the strong thesis: For every instance of evil, God is justified in allowing it" ("Reply to Richard Gale," *Religious Studies* 36 (2000): 221).

[11]   See Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 287.

[12]   A similar point is made by Kai Nielsen: "Suppose a writer, caring much about her work and struggling against odds to achieve something of merit and insight is, unknown to herself, about to receive the Nobel prize for literature. But the day before the announcement was to come to her, she suddenly and unexpectedly has a heart attack and dies without ever knowing that she has received the award. It is natural in such circumstances to lament 'Why did it have to happen to her just then, on just that day?'… We recognise, causally explainable though it is, that we are just up against one of those brute contingencies that happen for no rhyme or reason. There is no justifying it or blaming anyone for its happening; we are here outside the domain of what is justifiable and what is not." ("Can Anything Be Beyond Human Understanding?" in Timothy Tessin and Mario von der Ruhr (eds), *Philosophy and the Grammar of Religious Belief*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p. 165.)

[13]   It almost goes without saying that it is not necessary to provide a Theodicy$_1$ before providing a Theodicy$_2$ before a Theodicy$_3$, and so on. Indeed, any theodicy from level two upwards may also be employed as a level-one theodicy.

Edward Martin has suggested that, if a satisfying level-two theodicy can be developed, then that very theodicy can function as – or at least support – a level-four theodicy. That is to say, an explanation as to why God permits a certain type of evil will necessarily be an explanation for all the tokens that fall under that type (see Martin, *The Evidential Argument from Evil in Recent Analytic Philosophy*, p. 172). This, however, is mistaken, for there may well be particular instances of evil that have no explanation and are thus gratuitous, even though the existence of some evil or other is necessary for some greater good. $E1$, for example, may have been preventable without the loss of any significant good, even though *all* instances of natural evil cannot be prevented without the loss of some greater good (e.g., the existence of a lawlike, natural order).

[14]   Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 15; cf. Swinburne, "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 18 (1988): 298, and "Some Major Strands of Theodicy," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, p. 46, fn. 2. A similar position is advocated by Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," pp. 126–27, and Hasker, "Suffering, Soul-Making, and Salvation," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 28 (1988): 5. It is sometimes held, mistakenly in my view, that one of the differences between a defence and a theodicy is that the former only hopes to show that morally sufficient reasons are available for any given *E*, whereas the latter attempts to show that these reasons are in fact God's reasons for permitting *E*. This method

of distinguishing a defence from a theodicy seems to have originated with Plantinga – see, for example, his *God, Freedom, and Evil*, pp. 27–28.

[15]   Plantinga, "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," p. 7. A similar account is proposed by Henry Schuurman, "The Concept of a Strong Theodicy," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27 (1990): 66, and "Two Concepts of Theodicy," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1993): 210.

[16]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 230.

[17]   Rowe cites the following passage from Plantinga's "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil" in support of the claim that G_2 (G_1 & E) is equivalent to G_1: "if a good state of affairs G includes an evil state of affairs E, then the conjunctive state of affairs G *and* E is equivalent to G (just as a proposition A is equivalent to A & B if A entails B)" (p. 7).

[18]   Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 230.

[19]   Cf. Melville Stewart's analysis of outweighing, or what he calls 'overbalancing': A good G overbalances an evil E if and only if (a) G *exists* entails E *exists*, and (b) an agent who creates or permits E for the sake of G is thereby morally praiseworthy. (See Stewart, *The Greater-Good Defence: An Essay on the Rationality of Faith*, p. 64; Stewart is here following Keith Yandell's account in "The Greater Good Defense," *Sophia* 13 (1974): 4.) Like (6″), this account allows the notion of overbalancing to be defined in non-quantitative terms. This is an advantage, for as Stewart observes, at least some 'better than' relations are qualitative – for example, Kant is a better philosopher than Locke. Stewart's account, however, is seriously defective. Clause (a) tells us what it would take for E to be a necessary condition for G – but this is irrelevant in an account of overbalancing, for E may be overbalanced by, without being a prerequisite for, G. Clause (b) is similarly out of place, for G may outweigh E even though it is morally repugnant of God to permit E for the sake of G.

[20]   Swinburne proposes an account essentially the same as (6′) when explicating the notion of an evil serving a greater good (see his *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 12)

[21]   See Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," in Marilyn Adams and Robert Adams (eds), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 57–58. Rowe also claims that (6) has a second peculiar consequence: "if there is some good state of affairs G that outweighs an evil state of affairs E, then – no matter how unrelated the two may be – there will be a good state of affairs G_1 (that is, G and E) that outweighs E and is such that O [i.e., the theistic God] can obtain it (G_1) only by permitting E" ("The Empirical Argument from Evil," p. 230). What Rowe has uncovered here is not so much a problem with (6) but a further meta-theodical constraint – viz., where there is a good G_1, made up of a good part G and a bad part E, E must be logically necessary for *both G_1 and G*. The requirement that there be a logically necessary connection between goods and evils is discussed below.

[22]   See Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," p. 62.

[23]   *Ibid*., p. 60.

[24]   *Ibid*., p. 61, emphasis his. Another of Chisholm's oft-cited illustrations of the notion of defeat involves a painting with an ugly patch: "A certain combination of paints may be ugly. This combination may be entailed by a larger whole that is not ugly or that is even beautiful. And the larger whole may be preferable aesthetically just because of the ugliness of the part that is ugly" ("The Defeat of Good and Evil," p. 61).

[25]   The conjunction of (b) and (c) in (8) above leads to the paradoxical conclusion that the whole (G & E) is better than the sum of its parts, G and E. The paradox, however, is removed once it is borne in mind that the value of a whole may be dependent not only on the nature of its parts taken separately, but also on the way in which the parts are related. As A.C. Ewing has remarked, "It would

be very odd if such an important feature in reality as relation did not make any difference to value"
(*Value and Reality*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 215). The notion of defeat is thus underwritten by the Moorean doctrine of organic unity, according to which the intrinsic value of a whole need not be equal to the sum of the intrinsic values of its parts. G.E. Moore defends this doctrine in *Principia Ethica* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1988 [originally published 1903]), §18–22, pp. 27–36. On the connections between the notion of defeat and that of organic unity, see Chisholm, *Brentano and Intrinsic Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 69–89.

[26]   Cf. Chisholm, "The Defeat of Good and Evil," p. 57.

[27]   See Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 336, fn. 3.

[28]   Stewart, *The Greater-Good Defence*, p. 65, emphasis his.

[29]   Adams, "Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God," p. 307. As this quote suggests, Adams assumes that any patient-centred good secured by horrendous evil must be a good of the *defeater* kind – I prefer, however, to leave the door open for outweighing and counterbalancing goods.

[30]   Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil," p. 48.

[31]   This position has been defended by Marilyn McCord Adams in various writings – refer to the references cited in fn. 31 of Chapter 7. The additional constraint mentioned here is, of course, applicable only to those who have the cognitive capacity to assess the value of their life – infants and animals would therefore be excluded.

[32]   This point is made very well by Henry Schuurman, who argues that the mere fact that *E* is outweighed or defeated by *G* could not suffice to justify God in permitting *E* for the sake of *G* ("The Concept of a Strong Theodicy," pp. 66–73, "Two Concepts of Theodicy," pp. 210–11). Schuurman, however, also maintains that it is not *necessary* for *E* to be defeated or outweighed in order for God to be justified in allowing *E*. This issue will be explored in Chapter 12 when considering the compatibility of gratuitous evil with theistic belief.

[33]   Similar adequacy conditions to those listed above have been proposed by Swinburne, "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?" pp. 289–90, "Theodicy, Our Well-Being, and God's Rights," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995): 75–76, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 13–14; Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 336; Dewey Hoitenga, "Logic and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1967): 115; and Bruce Langtry, "Some Internal Theodicies and the Objection from Alternative Goods," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 34 (1993): 33, "Structures of Greater Good Theodicies: The Objection from Alternative Goods," *Sophia* 37 (1998): 5, 9.

Perhaps a further constraint needs to be specified: the goods appealed to by the theodicist must be *intrinsic goods*, and the evils these goods explain must be *intrinsic evils*. What exactly constitutes intrinsic goodness or value, whether this notion can be made intelligible, and (if it can) whether it is ever exemplified in reality are hotly contested topics. (See, e.g., Mark Bernstein, "Intrinsic Value," *Philosophical Studies* 102 (2001): 329–43, where the intelligibility of the notion of intrinsic value is questioned.) Those who have no qualms with intrinsic value sometimes subscribe to the Moorean view that "to say that a kind of value is 'intrinsic' means merely that the question whether a thing possesses it, and in what degree it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question" (G.E. Moore, *Philosophical Studies*, New York: The Humanities Press, 1951 [originally published in 1922], p. 260). Rowe, being an avowed Moorean in ethics, would have no difficulty with the additional adequacy condition proposed here. See, for example, Rowe's "Evil and Theodicy," p. 123, where it is implied that the theodicist must appeal to intrinsic goods, examples of which are pleasure, happiness, love, the exercise of virtue, and good intentions.

[34]   Plantinga, "Self-Profile," in James Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen (eds), *Alvin Plantinga* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1985), p. 43. There is, however, a more minimal kind of defence that does not seek to show that the evil in question is compatible with the truth of theism, but only aims to expose a fault in the atheologian's argument or reasoning. A defence of this minimal sort can, of course, be employed in response to both logical and evidential formulations of the problem of evil – indeed, as we have seen, sceptical theists advance such a defensive strategy in relation to Rowe's evidential argument.

[35]   This has often been a cause of complaint against Plantinga's free will defence and by extension the entire project of defence – see, for example, George Mavrodes, "Some Recent Philosophical Theology," pp. 107–08, and David Ray Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, pp. 42–49.

[36]   Van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): p. 66; cf. "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," p. 141.

[37]   See van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," p. 67.

[38]   Van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," pp. 141–42.

[39]   Peter Forrest, in Chapter 8 of his *God Without the Supernatural* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), follows a similar path in responding to the evidential problem of evil. His aim, as he puts it, is to provide "a speculative understanding of evil," where this involves "establishing the genuine epistemic possibility that a good God would allow the evils that disfigure this otherwise surpassingly beautiful world of ours" (pp. 213–14).

[40]   The Satan hypothesis as a solution to the (evidential) problem of evil fails because, first, it is entirely *ad hoc* to postulate the existence of fallen angels in order to save theism from falsification (at least in the absence of independent evidence for the existence of such beings), and secondly, science provides us with an adequate understanding in purely physical terms of many of the phenomena that were once thought to be explained by the behaviour of fallen angels (e.g., tornadoes, leprosy). It is not uncommon, however, to find Satan occupying a central role in contemporary theodicies – see, for example, Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), and Robert Francis Allen, "St. Augustine's Free Will Theodicy and Natural Evil," *Ars Disputandi* 3 (2003), located at <http://www.ArsDisputandi.org>. Plantinga, of course, is renown for invoking the Satan hypothesis in response to both logical and evidential versions of the problem of evil. See Plantinga's *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 191–95, but also Tooley's criticisms of Plantinga's position, in "Alvin Plantinga and the Argument from Evil," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1980): 371–72. As for the doctrine of the Fall, refer to the following footnote.

[41]   A theodicy based on the doctrine of the Fall, as this has been traditionally understood, would proceed as follows:

Because of the sin committed by Adam and Eve, all of the following generations of humans, including Adam and Eve (but perhaps excluding Jesus and his mother), (a) became subject to pain, suffering and physical death, as well as subject to the devil insofar as the devil was able to influence them strongly; and (b) developed a natural or inborn desire to turn away from God and to satisfy themselves in ways that are contrary to both reason and divine law. In addition, the fall of Adam and Eve introduced natural evil into the world, including naturally occurring animal suffering.

Notwithstanding the justifications offered by theologians for this kind of account (e.g., the notion of the *felix culpa*), one cannot escape the fact that the punishment meted out is highly disproportional to Adam and Eve's disobedience. When the question of the historicity of Adam and

Eve, and the problem of harmonizing the story of the Fall with evolutionary theory, are also taken into account, any theodicy such as the above cannot reasonably held to be plausible. For an attempt (unsuccessful in my view) to develop a theodicy based in part on a literal account of the Fall that addresses some of the foregoing objections, see Eleonore Stump, "The Problem of Evil," pp. 402–05. But see the criticisms of Michael Smith in "What's So Good About Feeling Bad?" *Faith and Philosophy* 2 (1985): 425 (to which Stump replies in "Suffering for Redemption," pp. 432–33), and Evan Fales, "Antediluvian Theodicy: Stump on the Fall," *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (1989): 320–29.

[42]   This is suggested by van Inwagen's recent short paper, "What Is the Problem of the Hiddenness of God?" (in Howard-Snyder and Moser (eds), *Divine Hiddenness*, pp. 24–32), where a defence is described as "an internally consistent story according to which God and evil both exist", but notes that "sometimes the following two requirements are added: The evil in the story must be of the amounts and kinds that we observe in the actual world, *and the story must contain no element that we have good scientific or historical reasons to regard as false*" (p. 30, emphasis mine). The difference between a defence and a theodicy, van Inwagen goes on to say, is that the theodicist puts forward her story "as true or at least highly plausible" (p. 30).

However, the notion of 'no good reason to regard *p* as false' is ambiguous, for it may mean (a) our set of background beliefs *k* does not entail not-*p*, or (b) given *k*, there is no way of determining the probability of *p*, or (c) given *k*, it is not likely that *p* is false. It is not entirely clear which of these senses van Inwagen has in mind. Perhaps on the most charitable reading, van Inwagen is to be thought of as holding that a successful defence is one that has the attributes of (a) and (b), but not of (c) – much like William Alston's 'live possibilities' in his "The Inductive Argument from Evil". For to think of (c) as being a necessary element of a successful defence is to blur the boundaries between a defence and a theodicy – since the former is only concerned with consistency, whereas the latter is also concerned with probability.

Indeed, this way of differentiating a defence from a theodicy comports well with van Inwagen's earlier writings. For example, in "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," van Inwagen attempts to construct a theodicy, where a theodicy is understood as a story that is not merely possible in the broadly logical sense, but is "consonant with and a plausible elaboration of the data of Christian revelation" and also contains no proposition that is "improbable on the whole set of propositions endorsed by the special sciences" (p. 162). And in "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," van Inwagen notes that "the probability of a defense need not be high on theism. (That is, a defense need not be such that its denial is surprising on theism)" (p. 141).

[43]   See Richard Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," pp. 214–15.

[44]   I am indebted here to Paul Draper, "The Skeptical Theist," in Howard-Snyder (ed.), *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, pp. 182–87, where the counterdefensive strategy is employed with great vigour against van Inwagen.

[45]   According to van Inwagen, "The anti-noetist's demand that the noetist produce a noödicy is wholly unreasonable" ("The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," p. 158), and this because we simply do not know enough in order to assign a probability value to the explanations offered by the noetist as to why there is cosmic silence. Draper has responded to van Inwagen's scepticism by claiming that a successful noödicy can in fact be developed – "The Skeptical Theist," p. 191, fn. 21. Van Inwagen, in turn, has replied that Draper's noödicy fails (partly) because Draper has not shown that the probability of his noödicy, conditional on our present relevant knowledge, is high – "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell, and Gale," pp. 232–33. But this clearly fails to address Draper's concerns regarding the availability of counterdefences. Van Inwagen,

however, does attempt to allay these concerns by maintaining that the defences and counterdefences employed in cases such as Richard III, extraterrestrial life, and the problem of evil – unlike those employed in the cases Draper mentions – are of the kind that we lack sufficient information to make reasonable judgments about their probability value (see van Inwagen, "Reflections," pp. 229–30). This, however, is not a relevant disanalogy, for as I have tried to show above, Draper's point can also be made by considering 'aprobable' stories (or stories that van Inwagen regards as aprobable).

[46]   Cf. the adequacy conditions for theodicy given by John Hick, which resemble the position advocated here but also have some affinities with van Inwagen's proposal – Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, 2nd ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 38.

[47]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 127.

[48]   See Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," p. 127, "Paradox and Promise," p. 114, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 264, and "God and Evil," p. 7.

[49]   A similar constraint on the development of a theodicy is adopted by Michael Tooley, "The Problem of Evil," p. 22, Richard Swinburne, "Does Theism Need a Theodicy?" pp. 289–90, and William Hasker, "Suffering, Soul-Making, and Salvation," p. 5. I may note here that to say that a particular good *G* is likely to obtain (given the truth of theism) is not to be committed to the view that *G* is in fact God's reason for permitting evil. For it may well be the case that *G* has obtained or will obtain, but *G* plays no part in motivating God's permission of evil even though *G* could play such a role. Thus, it is entirely consistent to demand of the theodicist that she only postulate goods that are likely to obtain and, at the same time, not requiring that she be able to reveal God's actual reasons for permitting evil.

This is what I think: We were sent forth by humanity, by mankind, although it was not even aware it was doing so, to find out once and for all if there's a God. That's the meaning of the camps. It was meant to bring Him out into the open if He existed at all. Nothing else or less significant could have brought Him out into the open, to respond and to act and to show His face. It was a stupendous test; unconscious and unintentional but a test nevertheless. And God failed the test and proved His own nonexistence. And I, as part of the experiment, stopped believing in Him altogether. Just as certain laboratory experiments are conclusive and incontrovertible, so was this.

If He wouldn't come out then, during those times, when?

Now when man writes his history he can say there was a vast laboratory experiment conducted by man during the 1940s to see if there is a God or not. The conclusion was no God exists. There were guinea pigs in the test and other kinds of experimental animals, but mainly guinea pigs – Jews of course. I know. I was one of them.

(Holocaust survivor, quoted in Reeve Robert Brenner, *The Faith and Doubt of Holocaust Survivors*, p. 110)

10. THEODICY PROPER, OR CASTING LIGHT ON THE WAYS OF GOD: HORRENDOUS MORAL EVIL

Having delineated some of the most important adequacy conditions that a theodicy must satisfy, the next step is to seek a theodicy that stands the best chance of satisfying these conditions. If such a theodicy can be constructed, then Rowe's evidential argument – specifically, his factual premise – will have been refuted. As noted in the previous chapter, the theodicist's primary *explanandum* is 'horrendous evil', and this comes in at least two broad varieties: horrendous *moral* evil and horrendous *natural* evil. In what follows, I will begin with the former category and will provide an outline of a theodicy (in fact, a conglomeration of various theodicies) that purports to show how moral evil of the horrendous kind can be reconciled with theistic belief. I will then subject this theodicy to two criticisms that it has occasioned. In the following chapter the explanatory power of theism will be further tested in the light of horrendous natural evil.[1]

1   SKETCH OF A THEODICY

How might a theodicist seek to explain horrendous moral evil? Before answering this question, a few words on the nature of the type of evil under consideration may be in order. It will be recalled from Chapter 2 that a horrendous evil is to be thought of as an especially heinous event involving the dehumanization or devaluation of the victim as well as the perpetrator. The category of horrendous evil cuts across the distinction between 'moral evil' and 'natural evil' (at least as I have drawn this distinction in Section 2.1.1 of Chapter 2). Thus, a 'horrendous moral evil', or HME, is one in which the process of devaluation is brought about by the freely willed actions (or omissions) of human beings, who therefore become morally blameworthy or responsible for the

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resultant evil. For example, in Rowe's *E*2 and in the child abuse stories described in Book 5, ch. 4 of *The Brothers Karamazov*, the horrific evil inflicted on innocent children results from the perpetrators' misuse of their free will, thus making the perpetrators accountable for these evils. By contrast, a 'horrendous natural evil', or HNE, is solely or chiefly the product of the operation of the laws of nature or non-culpable human action or negligence, and so blame or responsibility cannot attach to any (non-divine) moral agent. For example, the terrible pain and death of Rowe's fawn is not the result of any human wrongdoing but is entirely due to a fire caused by lightning; no human person, therefore, can be held liable for the fawn's fate. Similar things may be said about the harm or suffering brought about by natural or impersonal forces in the November 1755 Lisbon earthquake and the December 2004 Asian tsunami disaster.[2]

What sort of goods, then, can be invoked in order to develop a theodicy for HME that meets the criteria established in Chapter 9? Here I wish to outline a proposal consisting of three themes that have figured prominently in the theodical literature.

(1) *Soul-making*. Inspired by the thought of the early Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyon (c.130-c. 202 CE), John Hick has put forward in a number of writings, but above all in his 1966 classic *Evil and the God of Love*, a theodicy that appeals to the good of soul-making.[3] According to Hick, the divine intention in relation to humankind is to bring forth perfect finite personal beings by means of a 'vale of soul-making' in which humans may transcend their natural self-centredness by freely developing the most desirable qualities of moral character and entering into a personal relationship with their Maker. Any world, however, that makes possible such personal growth cannot be a hedonistic paradise whose inhabitants experience a maximum of pleasure and a minimum of pain. Rather, an environment that is able to produce the finest characteristics of human personality – particularly the capacity to love – must be one in which "there are obstacles to be overcome, tasks to be performed, goals to be achieved, setbacks to be endured, problems to be solved, dangers to be met."[4] A soul-making environment must, in other words, share a good deal in common with our world, for only a world containing great dangers and risks, as well as the genuine possibility of failure and tragedy, can provide opportunities for the development of virtue and character. A necessary condition, however, for this developmental process to take place is that humanity be situated at an 'epistemic distance' from God. The notion of epistemic distance is explored more fully in Chapter 8, but suffice it to say here that, on Hick's view, if we were initially created in the direct presence of God we could not *freely* come to love

and worship God. So as to preserve our freedom in relation to God, the world must be created religiously ambiguous or must appear, to some extent at least, as if there were no God. And evil, of course, plays an important role in creating the desired epistemic distance.

Finally, Hick appends to his theodicy a universalist eschatology that extends the soul-making process beyond the grave. Although there are some people whose character is strengthened and transformed through the challenges and dangers they encounter, there clearly are many others who make little or no progress due to dying young or even regress after finding themselves in terribly adverse circumstances. It seems, then, that the soul-making process, if it exists at all, is quite ineffective. To circumvent this problem, Hick speculates that this process does not terminate at death, so that anyone unfit for communion with God by the end of their earthly life continues on the course of moral and spiritual growth until they too attain the ultimate heavenly state of an eternal life of love and fellowship with God. This final state is described by Hick as an "infinite because eternal future good that justifies and redeems all the pain and suffering, sin and sorrow, which has occurred on the way to it."[5] Indeed, on Hick's view, our sufferings are not merely outweighed by this future good but are defeated (in the Chisholmian sense of the term) by it, for as he states in an oft-quoted passage,

> One who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state of either innocence or of virtue.[6]

A world, then, in which we are morally perfect by nature or at all times is not as good or valuable as a world in which the virtues are learned through a process of soul-making. And so any world created by God must include such a learning process in order to provide scope for the actualization of virtue. Paradise cannot be had on the cheap.

(2) *Free will*. The appeal to human freedom, in one guise or another, constitutes an enduring theme in the history of theodicy. Typically, the kind of freedom that is invoked by the theodicist is the *libertarian* sort, according to which I am free with respect to a particular action at time *t* only if the action is not determined by all that happened or obtained before *t* and all the causal laws there are in such a way that the conjunction of the two (the past and the laws) logically entails that I perform the action in question. My mowing the lawn, for instance, constitutes a voluntary action only if, the state of the universe (including my beliefs and desires) and laws of nature being just as they were immediately preceding my decision to mow the lawn, I could

have chosen or acted otherwise than I in fact did. In this sense, the acts I per-
form freely are genuinely 'up to me' – they are not determined by anything
external to my will, whether these be causal laws or even God. And so it is not
open to God to cause or determine just what actions I will perform, for if he
does so those actions could not be free. Freedom and determinism are incom-
patible.[7]

The theodicist, however, is not so much interested in libertarian freedom
as in libertarian freedom of the *morally relevant* kind, where this consists of
the freedom to choose between good and evil courses of action. The theod-
icist's freedom, moreover, is intended to be *morally significant*, not only
providing one with the capacity to bring about good and evil, but also mak-
ing possible a range of actions that vary enormously in moral worth, from
great and noble deeds to horrific evils.

Armed therefore with such a conception of freedom, the free will theodi-
cist proceeds to explain the existence of moral evil as a consequence of the
misuse of our freedom. This, however, means that responsibility for the exis-
tence of moral evil lies with us, not with God. Of course, God is responsible
for creating the conditions under which moral evil could come into existence.
But it was not inevitable that human beings, if placed in those conditions,
would go wrong. It was not necessary, in other words, that humans would mis-
use their free will, although this always was a possibility and hence a risk
inherent in God's creation of free creatures.

The free will theodicist adds, however, that the value of free will is so
great as to outweigh the risk that it may be misused in various ways. It may
be held, for example, that free will of the morally significant kind bestows
on us a level of dignity and personal worth that would be lost if we lacked
self-determination. Laura Ekstrom sums up this line of thought well:

> If I am just a puppet, then my life is trivialized. I do not have any dignity
> or significance as an agent. Without free will, I am a plaything, a passive
> toy. To find out that this is true of me would lead to a sense of despair
> and hopelessness. Life would not seem to mean anything, one might
> think, if I did not possess the sense of dignity deriving from knowing
> that at least some aspects of the direction and outcome of my life owe
> themselves directly to me.[8]

Developing this point further, one might say that free will provides us with
the opportunity to engage in soul-making, thus providing us with deep
responsibilities (e.g., the responsibility for the sort of person we become
and the choices we make) and giving us the ability to enter into relationships
of love with others, including God. As Kierkegaard said in his *Journal*, "The

most tremendous thing conceded to man is – choice, freedom."[9] Given that freedom has such great value, it is better that God create a world with agents who possess free will, even though they may misuse it, than to create a world of mere automata.

(3) *Heavenly bliss.* Theodicists sometimes draw on the notion of a heavenly afterlife to show that evil, particularly horrendous evil, only finds its ultimate justification or redemption in the life to come. Accounts of heaven, even within the Christian tradition, vary widely. But one common feature in these accounts that is relevant to the theodicist's task is *the experience of complete felicity for eternity brought about by intimate and loving communion with God.*[10] This good, as we saw, plays a key role in Hick's theodicy, and it also finds a central place in Marilyn Adams' account of horrendous evil.

Adams notes that, on the Christian worldview, the direct experience of 'face-to-face' intimacy with God is not only the highest good we can aspire to enjoy, but is also an incommensurable good – more precisely, it is incommensurable with respect to any merely temporal evils or goods.[11] As the apostle Paul put it, "our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom 8:18; cf. 2 Cor 4:17). This glorification to be experienced in heaven, according to Adams, vindicates God's justice and love toward his creatures. For the experience of the beatific vision outweighs any evil, even evil of the horrendous variety, that someone may suffer, thus ensuring a balance of good over evil in the sufferer's life that is overwhelmingly favourable. But as Adams points out, "strictly speaking, there will be no *balance* to be struck,"[12] since the good of the vision of God is incommensurable with respect to one's participation in any temporal or created evils. And so an everlasting, post-mortem beatific vision of God would provide anyone who experienced it with good reason for considering their life – in spite of any horrors it may have contained – as a great good, thus removing any grounds of complaint against God.[13]

Bringing these three themes together, a theodicy can be developed with the aim of explaining and justifying God's permission of HME. Whether such a theodicy succeeds in this respect will de determined soon. Here I merely wish to illustrate how a theodicy of this kind can be applied to specific instances of HME, and to this end I will concentrate on Rowe's *E2* and the Holocaust of 1939–45.

These two exemplifications of HME clearly involve a serious misuse of free will on behalf of the perpetrators. We could, therefore, begin by postulating God's endowment of humans with morally significant free will as the first good that is served by these evils. That is to say, God cannot both prevent any instance of horrendous moral evil, such as the terrible suffering and death

endured by Sue and the millions of Holocaust victims, and at the same time create us with morally significant freedom – the freedom to do great evil, great good and everything in between. In addition, these evils may provide an opportunity for soul-making – in many cases, however, the potential for soul-making would not extend to the victim but only to those who cause or witness the suffering. The phenomenon of 'jailhouse conversions', for example, testifies to the fact that even horrendous evil may occasion the moral transformation of the perpetrator. However, free will and this form of soul-making are not patient-centred goods, and so an appeal to such goods will not suffice to exonerate God. In line with the third adequacy condition listed in Section 2 of Chapter 9, a satisfactory theodicy must hold that the tribulations of the victims at least serve a good that benefits them in some way. This is where the doctrine of heaven comes in. Postmortem, the victims in the cases under consideration are ushered into a relation of beatific intimacy with God, an incommensurable good that 'redeems' their past participation in horrors. For the beatific vision in the afterlife not only restores value and meaning to the victim's life, but also provides them with the opportunity to endorse their life (taken as a whole) as worthwhile.[14]

2   PROBLEM I: CURTAILING THE EXERCISE OF FREE WILL

Perhaps the most important good that figures in this theodicy is that of free will, for this represents the fundamental reason why God permits many cases of HME (with the benefits of soul-making merely being by-products, and the good of heavenly bliss only being a compensatory good for the victim). Free will theodicies have, of course, attracted a number of criticisms, ranging from arguments against the intelligibility of the notion of libertarian freedom to doubts regarding the value of free will, particularly given the great amount of horrific evil it has introduced. In what follows, however, I will concentrate on a different line of argument espoused by both Michael Tooley and William Rowe. The central idea of these writers is that a perfectly good God would have intervened to prevent us from misusing our freedom to the extent that moral evil, particularly the horrific kind, would either not occur at all or occur on a much more infrequent basis. This position gains some support from the intuition that curtailing another's freedom is sometimes preferable to allowing them to abuse their free will. As Tooley observes:

There are many situations in which one believes that it is undoubtedly a good thing to interfere with the free actions of other people. If an individual decides to torture and murder a group of innocent people, one

tries to prevent him from doing so if at all possible. And in doing this, one believes that one is bringing about a state of affairs involving both less evil, and a better balance of good over evil, than what would exist if one were to allow the person to torture and murder the innocent people.[15]

We may, therefore, formulate the following principle, which is likely to be agreeable to theist and nontheist alike:

> (F) It is morally obligatory for a person S_1 to curtail another person's S_2 exercise of free will when certain circumstances obtain, such as when S_1 knows (or has compelling evidence for believing) that considerable suffering will result to an innocent person from S_2's exercise of free will.

But (F) seems to have dire consequences for free will theodicies. For consider the free actions of such 'moral monsters' as Hitler and Stalin or even Sue's attacker. If (F) is accepted, then it follows that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly loving being would have prevented, say, Sue's attacker from exercising his free will in such a way as to beat, rape and strangle the five-year-old girl. This, however, must be denied by the proponent of a free will theodicy (or a theodicy in which free will plays a constitutive role). What such a theodicist is therefore asking us to believe, as Tooley points out, is that

> if certain free actions of Stalin and Hitler and some of their friends had been interfered with, so that their lives had been shorter, or at least less productive, the result would have been a world that either contained more evil, or else a worse balance of good over evil, than that found in the actual world.[16]

But this claim, writes Tooley, "may reasonably be described as highly improbable." It seems far more reasonable to hold that the prevention of heinous moral evil reduces the amount of evil and produces a more favourable balance of good over evil – not only in the world (as Tooley suggests) but also in the victim's own life.[17]

There is, however, a major problem with the attempt to apply (F) to the theistic God, which may be expressed as follows:

> (1) If God were to prevent S_1's misuse of free will, then God would have to prevent every person's misuse of free will at all times,

where 'S_1's misuse of free will' represents Sue's attacker's exercise of free will during his brutalization of the child. In support of (1), it might be argued that

God would display a degree of unfairness or indiscriminate partiality if he were to intervene to prevent one instance of evil (viz., *E*2) but not intervene in other similar cases. But if God were to avert every misuse of free will, there would clearly be no freedom worthy of the name left for us to have. This is not to say that we would lose our free will altogether, for we may retain the freedom to choose between various goods. Indeed, it may be argued that this kind of freedom is the only one worth wanting. C. Robert Mesle, for example, writes:

> Why should we assume that the freedom to choose evil is so wonderful? I believe that meaningful freedom can exist where there are meaningful choices between goods – as when someone decides between devoting their life to art or to science. Further, I would argue that a good and omnipotent God should have created us with such a nature and in such an environment that we are free only to choose between goods.[18]

There is something to be said in support of this view, but in the end a world in which freedom is made 'safe' is, as David Lewis puts it, merely a 'playpen'.[19] If we do not have the freedom to do evil (i.e., if we do not have the capacity to misuse our free will) our choices would not matter, for they could never result in serious harm being done to our and other people's welfare. Moral responsibility, whether it be for our well-being or for the well-being of others, would be severely diminished, and so there would not be much at stake and thus not much of value in such a world.

The problem raised by (1), however, may be circumvented if (F) is thought of as ranging only over a certain class of free actions as opposed to absolutely all free actions. Indeed, this appears to be the way in which both Rowe and Tooley construe (F). In Rowe's words:

> While being free to do evil may be essential to genuine freedom, no responsible person thinks that the good of human freedom is so great as to require that no steps be taken to prevent some of the more flagrant abuses of free choice that result in massive, undeserved suffering by humans and animals. Any moral person who had the power to do so would have intervened to prevent the evil free choices that resulted in the torture and death of six million Jews in the Holocaust.[20]

Tooley also emphasizes that he intends to support a similar position:

> It is not being contended that the world would be improved if people were always prevented from acting immorally. The claim is only that there are many situations in which the amount of evil in the world would be reduced,

and the balance of good over evil improved, if someone were prevented from performing a certain action.[21]

At least one way of interpreting Rowe and Tooley here is to understand them as claiming, not that God would intervene in all cases of incipient wrongdoing, but that

> (2) God would prevent any exercise of free will that would, apart from divine intervention, result in the instantiation of some HME.

On this view, God would only intervene in a small proportion of instances involving the abuse of free will, viz., those that would become (if it were not for divine intervention) a case of HME. One might then go on to claim that the magnitude of the evil described in *E*2 is so great as to qualify this case as one of the misuses of free will that a perfectly good God would have prevented. Indeed, there seem to be far too many instances of HME like *E*2 where divine intervention was to be expected but was not forthcoming, thus suggesting that free will theodicies fail when measured by the standards of a Theodicy$_3$.

But if God were to implement a program of preventing all cases of HME, this would, I suspect, lead to a serious diminution of our freedom. Consider, for example, such large-scale evils as the Holocaust and Stalin's dictatorship. Rowe, as quoted earlier, states that "any moral person who had the power to do so would have intervened to prevent the evil free choices that resulted in the torture and death of six million Jews in the Holocaust." But John Hick ably identifies the problem with this view:

> Was God supposed to change Hitler's nature, or to have engineered his sudden death, at a certain point in history? But the forces leading to the Holocaust ramify out far beyond that one man. God would have had to override the freedom not only of Hitler and the Nazis, but all participants in the widespread secular anti-Semitism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, which itself was rooted in nearly two thousand years of Christian anti-Semitism. Further, having prevented this particular evil, God would be equally obliged to prevent all other very great human evils … Where should a miraculously intervening God have stopped? Only, it would seem, when human free will had been abolished.[22]

Hick's point is that broadly defined moral evils, such as the Holocaust, encompass so many misuses of free will that if God were to prevent each of these moral evils we would be left with very little, if any, free will. Of course, not all instances of HME are as broad (in a geographical and temporal sense)

as the Holocaust or Stalin's dictatorship, and it might be thought that the dif-
ficulties raised by Hick could be circumvented if we restricted our sights
to very particular or 'finely grained' instances of HME such as $E2$. But the
problem is not removed even if we confine ourselves to such instances of
HME. For the point is that the wider the range of instances of moral evil
(irrespective of whether they are of a very general or a very particular sort)
that is placed beyond the bounds of human capability, the greater the extent
to which our free will is diminished. And as our free will is diminished, so is
the scope of our *responsibility* and the *meaning or significance of our lives*.

It is clearly a great good to have, at least under certain circumstances, a
significant measure of responsibility for our own well-being and for the well-
being of other people, animals, and the inanimate world. Such deep respon-
sibility involves the ability to benefit others in great ways, but also to cause
them serious harm, even to the point of ending their life. To prevent indi-
vidual instances of HME such as $E2$ would therefore require the loss of the
good of deep responsibility. As Swinburne puts it,

> [I]f there is always someone else in the background who will step in to
> save those children who are neglected and abused, parents will not have
> the serious responsibility of care. The good of serious responsibility
> makes almost inevitable many great moral evils.[23]

But the removal of HME brings with it not only the removal of morally signif-
icant free will and serious responsibility, but also the removal of meaning and
value in our lives. The meaningfulness of human life is, in large part, depend-
ent on the significance of the choices we can make. If we never have the oppor-
tunity to choose between acts that will provide great benefits and acts that will
inflict great harms, our choices would lose much of their significance and, as a
result, our lives would lose much of their meaning. Thus, a world in which God
always prevents us from freely performing very wicked acts would, as C.
Stephen Layman states, "pale in significance to the world we find ourselves in
– a world full of drama, in which acts have enormous significance."[24]

I need not disagree, therefore, with the following condition put forward
by Rowe specifying the circumstances under which God would prevent
instances of HME:

(3) God would intervene to prevent any exercise of free will that results
in HME only if either:
 (a) such intervention does not significantly diminish the agent's
 capacity to freely do good and evil, or

(b) the value of the agent's capacity to freely do good and evil is outweighed by the disvalue of the evil performed.[25]

Where Rowe goes wrong, however, is in holding that condition (a) is satisfied in various actual cases of HME, such as *E*2. For as I have attempted to show, God's prevention of all instances of HME would severely diminish the scope of our free will – and this, in turn, would significantly impact on the level of our responsibility and the value of our lives. I conclude, then, that the case in support of applying (F) to divine agency fails, thus providing us with no reason for thinking that the exercise of human free will ought to have been curtailed (or curtailed further) by God. Theodicists, therefore, are left free to continue appealing to free will, of the morally significant kind, as God's justification for allowing HME.

3   PROBLEM II: NECESSARY EVILS?

Free will theodicies, as we have seen, maintain that the existence of moral evil is permitted by God so as to preserve human free will, without which a host of significant goods – including self-determination, moral responsibility, and relationships of love and friendship – would be forever unattainable. In a recent contribution to *Sophia*, Joel Thomas Tierno has questioned whether such theodicies succeed in establishing a necessary connection between moral evil and free will.[26] Tierno concedes that free will, or the capacity to choose between good and evil courses of action, is inextricably linked with the capacity to act in morally evil ways. He claims, however, that this link fails to provide a sufficient reason or explanation for the existence of moral evil in God's creation. The argument developed by Tierno is interesting and initially appealing, but it embodies a deep-seated misunderstanding that is worth exposing in order to understand properly the nature of free will theodicies.

3.1   Tierno's 'Adequacy Argument' Against Free Will Theodicies

Tierno advances what he calls the 'Adequacy Argument' in an attempt to show that the appeal to human freedom does not provide an adequate explanation for God's permission of moral evil. His argument can be summarized as follows.

Our possession of free will entails that we have "the capacity for choice" on a wide range of matters, a capacity that makes possible all sorts of decisions and actions. For example, "we have the power to destroy ourselves. We have the power to live as celibates. We have the power to give away all of our earthly goods and devote the remainder of our lives to enlightened altruism."[27] These particular capacities are, of course, rarely exercised – only relatively few of us, for instance, decide to join a monastery. By contrast, the capacity for moral evil is exercised by almost all people at one time or another. Consider this:

> How many of the people of your acquaintance, on at least one occasion, have acted for the specific purpose of causing another human being to suffer? The exceptions are few. Of the exceptions, how many have acted for a selfish purpose fully recognizing that this would cause an innocent person to suffer? Probably most have.[28]

How can we best account for such facts? The appeal to free will, unfortunately, will be of little help. Free will does, of course, explain why we are able to make choices that issue in moral evil, but it cannot by itself explain why we do in fact make such choices. Put another way, our mere capacity to choose evil cannot adequately explain why we often actualize this capacity. Moral evil, given free will or the capacity for choice, is clearly possible but far from necessary. To invoke free will, therefore, will not succeed in justifying God's permission of moral evil.

Tierno formalizes the Adequacy Argument as follows:

(4) God created human beings.
(5) God gave human beings the capacity for choice.
(6) The capacity for choice underlies all kinds of capacities that few human beings realize.
(7) We almost universally use the capacity for choice, at one time or another, in ways that bring about moral evil.
(8) (Therefore) There must be something about human beings other than the mere capacity for choice which accounts for the almost universal disposition to commit morally evil actions.[29]

The function of premise (6) is to indicate that to possess the capacity to do something (e.g., the capacity to live a celibate life) need not mean that this capacity will be actualized. And so if a person were in fact to exercise the capacity in question, it will not do as an explanation of this fact to point out that that person possesses the capacity to act in the requisite way. Free will, in

other words, can never be a sufficient explanation for (7). To emphasize this, Tierno has us consider the following dialogue:

Jill: Jane killed herself last night!
Jack: I wonder why she did that?
Jill: Isn't it obvious? She has free will.

Jill's explanation, as Tierno states, is entirely inadequate, if not bizarre. Similarly, "our mere ability to act in morally evil ways is no explanation of the fact that we actually do act in such ways."[30] According to Tierno, any adequate explanation of this fact must make reference to "human nature", a position he goes on to defend against the opposing view that our moral depravity can be explained as a product of corrupt social institutions.[31]

3.2   The Inadequacy of Tierno's 'Adequacy Argument'

Tierno thus maintains that an important fact lies beyond the explanatory reach of the free will theodicist, viz., human beings very often use their freedom to act in ways that issue in moral evil. The appeal to free will, in other words, cannot account for the wide distribution of morally evil actions that we find in the world. Tierno concedes that free will does explain why we are *able* to act in morally evil ways. But, he adds, what cries out for explanation is not so much our capacity to choose to do evil, but the regularity with which we exercise this capacity. And the fact that we possess free will (i.e., the fact that we have the capacity to do evil) utterly fails to explain why we, with alarming frequency, actualize this capacity to do evil. As Tierno puts it, "Human freedom does not explain, in any way, shape, or form, the actual choices we make. It only explains our power to choose."[32]

In my first published reply to Tierno[33], I countered that Tierno (although an opponent of compatibilist views of freedom) is unwittingly seeking a form of explanation that can only be offered by a compatibilist. More precisely, I pointed out that the libertarian *qua* libertarian cannot provide a 'complete causal explanation' – that is, an explanation that invokes a set of sufficient antecedent causal conditions – as to why we regularly choose to act in a way that brings about moral evil. It might be worthwhile reproducing my original criticism in full:

I wish to suggest that Tierno is guilty of a fundamental oversight. In particular, he has completely overlooked the fact that free will theodicists are, by and large, libertarians, and that on the libertarian conception of

free will no complete explanation as to why we (freely) choose one course of action over another is available. The libertarian can, of course, appeal to such factors as hereditary, upbringing, and the environment as influencing one's choice. But, to borrow from Leibniz's famous dictum, such factors can only 'incline without necessitating'. That is to say, there is no set of factors, independent of the agent's will or 'self', that can *fully* account for the agent's choosing one way rather than the other. Thus, explanations that seek to identify sufficient reasons for our freely made choices will inevitably be beyond our reach. In demanding such explanations, therefore, Tierno is asking for the impossible from theodicists of the libertarian persuasion.[34]

Tierno responded that he has been misunderstood on this matter:

> I do not "seek a complete account of (or a sufficient reason for) the relative distributions of potential free actions". I do not seek a "set of factors, independent of the agent's will or 'self', that can fully account for the agent's choosing one way rather than the other" … My argument does not amount to asking the free will theodicist for the impossible. I am concerned with the relative distributions of different forms of potential free actions. Many of these forms of potential action are practically never realized. Others are widely distributed. One can ask why this is so without seeking a sufficient causal explanation of anything. I am also interested in the relative distributions of actual free acts that issue in moral evil in relation to potential free acts that would not. Whenever we freely choose a form of action that issues in moral evil, other options are open to us. We nonetheless frequently choose the acts that issue in evil. To ask why this is so is perfectly legitimate![35]

Tierno is certainly correct in holding that the unavailability of a complete causal explanation for the wide distribution of moral evil does not entail that no adequate explanation at all can be provided for this phenomenon. But then how is a libertarian to account for the wide distribution of human actions that issue in moral evil? Obviously, any account that appeals to some set of antecedent sufficient causal conditions is ruled out, for according to libertarians no such conditions can be specified when the actions in question are freely performed. Further, an account that appeals to environmental factors (such as upbringing and education) is ruled out by Tierno on the grounds that "the cross-cultural and trans-historical prevalence of forms of actions that issue in moral evil tends to undermine the credibility of an environmental explanation."[36] And finally, to take the wide distribution of moral evil as one

of the mysteries of free choice is to be, in the words of Tierno, "evasive and unpersuasive".[37] Tierno is therefore led to hold that the best explanation is one that appeals to our presocial nature:

> I argue that the most reasonable explanation of the comparative prevalence of genuine decisions and free actions that issue in moral evil is to connect these decisions and actions with features of our presocial nature(s).[38]

Briefly put, Tierno's view is that we so often go wrong because we are naturally disposed to do so. A traditionally-minded theologian would agree: We find ourselves in a fallen world where it is much easier to do evil than to do good – hence the sin and misery we unleash on a daily basis. Tierno adds, however, that this way of accounting for the wide distribution of moral evil "does not involve seeking a *sufficient* explanation for any of the relevant individual human actions."[39]

Tierno also points out that if his account of the 'broad demographics of free choice' is correct, then serious doubt would be cast on the benevolence of God. For if this world were created by an absolutely perfect being, as is postulated by traditional forms of theism, we would not expect to find ourselves with the natural (or presocial) inclinations that we do in fact possess:

> Suppose that we are the handiwork of a wholly good and perfectly wise divinity who can do anything that is logically possible. Should we then expect to be naturally constituted such that, all things considered, we are frequently disposed to act in ways that bring about significant moral evils? On the contrary, at the very least, we should expect our nature(s) not to dispose us to act in such ways. At the very least, we should expect the playing field to be level.[40]

Tierno thus turns his explanation for the wide distribution of moral evil into an argument against the existence of the theistic God. The fact that we are naturally inclined towards acts that bring about moral evil is highly surprising given the Judeo-Christian creation hypothesis and hence constitutes evidence against this hypothesis. To be sure, our natural inclinations do not necessitate the choices we make. But according to Tierno, this does not get God entirely off the hook since God is responsible for creating us with the natural inclinations that we have (and, according to Tierno, the stronger those inclinations, the greater the measure of God's responsibility[41]; perhaps also the greater the harm that such inclinations can produce, the greater is God's responsibility).

There is an element in Tierno's response that is not only correct but also highlights an important oversight in my original reply.[42] And this concerns Tierno's claim that, in seeking an adequate explanation for the wide distribution of moral evil, he is not implicitly committed to combatibilism. I would agree with Tierno that we need to distinguish between an 'adequate explanation' from a 'complete causal explanation', and that it is only an explanation of the former kind that is required from the free will theodicist. But as Tierno is at pains to point out, to request an 'adequate explanation' for some freely willed action is not to presuppose the truth of compatibilism.

In spite of this concession, however, Tierno's critique of free will theodicies remains troublesome. To begin with, consider the following line of thought that captures (faithfully, I hope) Tierno's objection to free will theodicies:

> Free will theodicists usually claim that God permits so much moral evil because he wishes us to have free will. But not just any kind of free will suffices for God's purposes. God wishes us to have *morally significant* free will – that is, the freedom to choose between a wide range of good and bad options, from the supererogatory to the horrendously evil. For it is only this sort of freedom that provides us with the opportunity to engage in soul-making (that is, a process of moral and spiritual growth).[43] But to have morally significant free will it is not necessary for us to be created with a defective nature, or with natural dispositions to do evil that are stronger than our natural dispositions to do good. Had we been created with a nature that is overall good, or at least good and evil in equal measure, the degree and scope of our free will would not have been impaired at all.

But if this is how Tierno's argument is to be understood, then Tierno would be open to the following line of criticism, which can be stated in the form of a dilemma:

 (I) *Either* God creates us with a *strongly* benevolent nature – that is, with natural dispositions to do good that strongly outweigh any natural dispositions we may have to do evil, *or*
 (II) God creates us with a *weakly* benevolent nature – that is, with natural dispositions to do good that outweigh (but do not strongly outweigh) any natural dispositions we may have to do evil.

The problem with option (I) is that it seems to rule out free will. For suppose that our nature is such that, whatever the circumstances in which we may

find ourselves, it is highly likely that we would choose to do the right thing. Good intentions and good actions would come naturally to us, so much so that the chance of any of us ever doing something wrong is miniscule. Perhaps on some libertarian conceptions of freedom we would still possess free will even if we were created with such natural tendencies (since the tendencies in question incline but do not necessitate). This, however, only highlights the dubious nature of such conceptions of free will. For someone to possess *genuine* free will, at least the following criteria must be satisfied: (a) it must be possible for them to find themselves in situations where they can choose between two different courses of action, *A* and *B*, *and* (b) in such situations there must be more than a negligible probability that they will perform *A* and a more than negligible probability that they will perform *B*. If someone could never be placed in such circumstances, we would be inclined to think of them as more akin to a pre-programmed machine than a person in control of their own destiny.

But option (II) is equally unappealing. For suppose that the strength of our natural tendencies to do good are only somewhat greater (but not vastly greater) than the strength of our natural tendencies to do evil. (Perhaps this is the contrary of our actual predicament, as we seem to be more disposed to the bad than the good, but not by a wide margin.) In this case, however, there would be no guarantee that the world would contain a narrow, rather than a wide, distribution of moral evil. The only way for God to guarantee, or even render highly likely, a narrow distribution of moral evil is to create us with a nature whose 'good side' far outstrips its 'bad side'. But this only takes us back to the unsavoury consequences that follow from option (I).

To state the same point somewhat differently but perhaps more perspicuously, consider the following:

F: We perform morally evil actions with great regularity.

This is the central fact that Tierno brings to our attention. The following hypotheses may be offered as potential explanations of *F*:

H1: We have morally significant free will – that is, the kind of free will required for soul-making.

H2: We are created with a *weakly benevolent* nature – that is, with dispositions to do good that are only somewhat stronger (but not very stronger) than our dispositions to do evil.

H3: We are created with a *weakly malevolent* nature.

H4: We are created with a *morally bivalent* nature – that is, with dispositions to do good that are of equal strength as our dispositions to do evil.

H5: We are created with a *strongly malevolent* nature – that is, with dispositions to do evil that are significantly stronger than our dispositions to do good.

H6: We are created with a *strongly benevolent* nature.

Tierno holds that H1, taken by itself, is insufficient to account for *F*. To arrive at an adequate explanation of *F* we must, according to Tierno, add something like H5 to H1. The problem here, as indicated earlier, is that H5 rules out free will of the morally significant kind (as does H6), and is therefore incompatible with H1.

   The only remaining option is to add either H2 or H3 or H4 to H1 in order to reach an adequate explanation of F. Now, it may be objected that, although the conjunction (H1 & [H2 or H3 or H4]) is internally consistent, it fails to account for *F*. For if we have free will of the sort required for soul-making, and we also have (say) a weakly benevolent nature, then why would we give in to temptation so often? But this merely necessitates an expansion of the original hypothesis along the following lines:

H7: We are created in a natural and social environment that is conducive to soul-making, that is to say, an environment containing great dangers and risks as well as the genuine possibility of failure and tragedy.

Given H1 and H7, together with either H2 or H3 or H4, fact *F* becomes entirely unsurprising. (This is not to say, however, that *F* is entailed by any conjunction of the aforementioned hypotheses.) Consider, for example, John Hick's soul-making theory, according to which God bestows on us a wide-ranging sort of free will and places us in a challenging environment that is capable of sustaining the soul-making process. This gives us H1 and H7. If we add, say, H3 to the mix, so that our natural (pre-social) dispositions are overall slightly more evil than good, it will hardly be surprising if many of our actions turn out to be morally evil. In other words, (H1 & H7 & [H2 or H3 or H4]) adequately accounts for *F*. But the free will theodicy, properly understood and elaborated, will consist of a conjunction like (H1 & H7 & [H2 or H3 or H4]).[44] And so the free will theodicy does manage to provide an 'adequate explanation', albeit not a 'complete causal explanation', for the wide distribution of moral evil.

   I hope to have shown that Tierno's critique of free will theodicies, even if it avoids the charge of relying on compatibilist assumptions, continues to fail to provide us with any good reason to think that free will theodicies are explanatorily inadequate.

4 CONCLUSION

It seems, then, that the free will theodicy emerges unscathed from the two objections considered above. It remains to be seen, however, how such a theodicy fares against various other objections, particularly the issue of the value or 'cost-effectiveness' of free will.[45] There is also the question whether the theodicy sketched in Section 1 succeeds as a theodicy on all three 'levels' (as these were detailed in Section 1 of Chapter 9), particularly the third level pertaining to the *amount* of horrendous evil. But it may be fair to conclude, on the basis of the discussion thus far, that a plausible justification of God's permission of HME is in the offing – more work may be required, but the task does not seem impossible to carry out. But even if the theist can adequately account for HME, a solution to the problem of horrendous natural evil, or HNE, must also be found. In the next chapter, I therefore consider the prospects of some theistic attempts to account for natural evil.

NOTES

[1]   Two preliminary notes before proceeding further. First, it is argued by Reformed epistemologists that one need not develop a theodicy in order to be rational in believing in God. The plausibility of this view is taken up in Chapter 1 (Section 2) – here I am only concerned with the issue of whether any adequate theodicy can be developed in response to Rowe's evidential argument. Second, it is sometimes held that the enterprise of theodicy is doomed to failure, or is morally insensitive, or exhibits a certain presumptuousness in the face of the mystery of God and evil, or is simply not a religiously appropriate undertaking. Such a position may be informed by a commitment to the kind of sceptical theism discussed in Chapters 4–6, or it may proceed from more general philosophical and theological considerations, as in the case of Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil*, and Terrence W. Tilley, *The Evils of Theodicy* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1991), ch. 9. Needless to say, I will be assuming that this view of theodicy is mistaken.

[2]   Almost inevitably, there are some borderline cases. First, it may not be clear what to say about horrendous evil inflicted by agents who, due to their young age or mental condition, do not appear to be morally autonomous. It is clear nevertheless that, insofar as an agent cannot be held morally responsible for their behaviour, the evil they inflict must be held to be 'natural' and not moral. The difficulty, of course, will lie in determining whether (or to what extent) moral responsibility can be attributed to the agent in question. Second, there is horrendous evil that is accidentally caused. It seems that if evil is not intentionally caused and is not the result of culpable negligence, it is best to categorize it as an instance of natural evil.

[3]   Hick develops his soul-making theodicy in Part IV of *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed. (London: Macmillan, 1966). Apart from this work, other important presentations of his theodicy occur in "God, Evil and Mystery," *Religious Studies* 3 (1968): 539–46; the revised edition of *Evil*

and the God of Love (New York: HarperCollins, 1977), which includes an extra chapter where Hick responds to some of his critics; "An Irenaean Theodicy," originally published in Stephen T. Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1981), pp. 39–52, and republished with some minor amendments in the new edition of Davis' collection issued in 2001 (both editions also contain interesting discussions between Hick and the other contributors); and *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1990), pp. 44–48.

4   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed., p. 362.

5   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed., p. 375. On Hick's eschatology, see also Part V of his *Death and Eternal Life* (Glasgow: Collins, 1976).

6   Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 1st ed., p. 291.

7   In this chapter I will be assuming, for the sake of argument, that the libertarian account of free agency is true, though I do not myself share this assumption. Many theists, moreover, do not accept libertarianism, but adopt a compatibilist conception of freedom. It would be interesting to put to the test the commonly-held view that a compatibilist account of freedom renders the problem of evil intractable for theism – on the *pro* side, see Antony Flew, "Compatibilism, Free Will and God," *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 231–44, and Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing For Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 91–96; while on the *contra* side, see Martin Davies, "Determinism and Evil," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1980): 116–27. See also Bruce Reichenbach, "Evil and a Reformed View of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988): 67–85, where it is pointed out that theologians in the Calvinist and Lutheran traditions have often attempted (unsuccessfully, in Reichenbach's view) to solve the problem of evil from within a compatibilist framework.

8   Laura Waddell Ekstrom, *Free Will: A Philosophical Study* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), p. 10. For a good outline of many of the goods that are, according to some, only made possible by libertarian free will, see Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 79–89.

9   *Søren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers*, vol. 2, ed. and transl. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1970), p. 69.

10   This is not to deny, however, that the theodicist may also appeal to other good states traditionally thought to be experienced by the inhabitants of heaven, including loving fellowship with other saints and freedom from the effects of natural and moral evil.

11   See Adams, "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil," in Robert Audi and William Wainwright (eds), *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 262–63, and *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, pp. 162–63. Similar views have been expressed by Eleonore Stump (in "The Problem of Evil"), whose theodicy draws on the mystic notion of 'union with God', and Jerry Walls (in *Heaven: The Logic of Eternal Joy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 113–32), who emphasizes the importance of heaven as a resource for any satisfactory theodicy.

12   Adams, "Redemptive Suffering," p. 263, emphasis hers.

13   Adams' account, I may note, not only requires the overbalancing but also the *defeat* of horrendous evil. Says Adams: "For God to be *good to* a created person, God must guarantee him/her a life that is a great good *to him/her* on the whole and one in which any participation in horrors is defeated within the context of his/her own life" (*Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*, p.156, emphases hers). The defeat of horrors, according to Adams, can take place in a number of ways, such as when horrendous suffering itself becomes a 'vision into the inner life of God' or when it enables the victim to 'identify with the crucified God' in some important way (these and

other scenarios as to how horrendous evil may be defeated are described in ch. 8 of Adams' *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*). As implied by the third condition listed in Section 2 of Chapter 9, I will not require the theodicist to specify defeater-goods, in addition to overbalancing goods, in cases involving victims of horrendous evil.

It may also be noted that Adams, in showing how horrendous evil may be balanced-off and defeated, is not attempting to identify any (morally sufficient) reasons why God permits such evil. Indeed, for Adams, the reasons why God permits horrors will always be at least partially mysterious to us. See Adams, "God and Evil: Polarities of a Problem," *Philosophical Studies* 69 (1993):178–79.

[14]   Given the limited cognitive and emotional capacities of infants, it may be objected that an infant would not be able to experience, or at least appreciate in any meaningful way, the joys of heaven (cf. Nathan Nobis, " 'Balancing Out' Infant Torture and Death: A Reply to Chignell," *Religious Studies* 37 (2001): 104–05). One way to overcome this problem would be to subscribe to Hick's eschatology where those, like Sue, who have died without being given a reasonable opportunity at personal growth are given another chance in another life (perhaps in a different universe). For a different line of argument against the free will theodicist's strategy of appealing to a heavenly afterlife, see Yujin Nagasawa, Graham Oppy, and Nick Trakakis, "Salvation in Heaven?" *Philosophical Papers* 33 (2004): 95–117.

[15]   Tooley, "Alvin Plantinga and the Argument from Evil," p. 373.

[16]   *Ibid*., p. 374.

[17]   I may point out here that in speaking of God as intervening, perhaps quite often, to prevent what would be heinous evils, one may instead think of God as setting up the causal laws in such a way that certain abuses of free will never take place.

[18]   C. Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique* (London: Macmillan, 1991), p. 31. One would have expected a process philosopher like Mesle to endorse the Whiteheadian 'law of the variables of power and value', according to which any decrease in the capacity to experience evil is always accompanied by a correlative decrease in the capacity to experience good and a similar decrease in the power of self-determination – see David Ray Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 225–29.

[19]   See David Lewis, "Evil for Freedom's Sake?" *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993): 154.

[20]   Rowe, "Grounds for Belief Aside," p. 136.

[21]   Tooley, "Alvin Plantinga and the Argument from Evil," p. 374.

[22]   Hick, "Rejoinder [to Critiques]," in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 2nd ed., p. 70.

[23]   Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 148.

[24]   C. Stephen Layman, "Moral Evil: The Comparative Response," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 53 (2003): 12.

[25]   See Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," p. 281. It is sometimes argued that any, or at least frequent, divine intervention in the world (i.e., miracles) would result in a chaotic world in which rational decision-making and agency would be rendered impossible. This criticism, however, does not have any force with respect to the kind of divine intervention proposed here. An agent-caused event may be represented as follows: (i) Intention → (ii) Action → (iii) Effect. Divine intervention can therefore occur at three different points: (1) God could prevent an agent from having the evil intention in the first place, or (2) God could prevent the agent from acting on this intention, or (3) God could prevent the effects from obtaining prior to (iii). But, at worst, it is only miraculous intervention of Type-3 that threatens to destroy world-order. I am indebted here to Ryan Nichols, "Actions, Their Effects and Preventable Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 46 (1999): 127–45.

²⁶   Joel Thomas Tierno, "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom," *Sophia* 40 (2001): 1–6. Tierno elaborates his position further, in response to objections raised by myself and another critic, in "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom: Response to Nagasawa and Trakakis," *Sophia* 43 (2004): 115–26.

²⁷   Tierno, "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom," p. 3.

²⁸   *Ibid*.

²⁹   *Ibid*., pp. 3–4.

³⁰   *Ibid*., p. 4.

³¹   *Ibid*., pp. 4–6.

³²   Tierno, "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom: Response to Nagasawa and Trakakis," p. 121.

³³   Nick Trakakis, "On the Alleged Failure of Free Will Theodicies: A Reply," *Sophia* 42 (2003): 99–106.

³⁴   *Ibid*., p. 103, emphasis in the original.

³⁵   Tierno, "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom: Response to Nagasawa and Trakakis," p. 125. In the first sentence of this passage Tierno is quoting from fn.13 (p. 106) of my paper, "On the Alleged Failure of Free Will Theodicies"; and in the second sentence of this passage Tierno is quoting from p. 103 of my same paper.

³⁶   Tierno, "On the Alleged Connection Between Moral Evil and Human Freedom: Response to Nagasawa and Trakakis," p. 125.

³⁷   *Ibid*., p. 126.

³⁸   *Ibid*.

³⁹   *Ibid*., emphasis his.

⁴⁰   *Ibid*., p. 124.

⁴¹   *Ibid*.

⁴²   What follows is drawn from my paper, "Second Thoughts on the Alleged Failure of Free Will Theodicies," *Sophia* 43 (2004): 83–89.

⁴³   As this indicates, free will is usually thought of by the free will theodicist as an *instrumental* good, not an *intrinsic* good. Therefore, Tierno's criticism that free will is no explanation for moral evil is to be understood as the claim that the goods allegedly made possible by free will can play no role in an explanation as to why we so often act in morally evil ways.

⁴⁴   In the case of H7, it may not be obvious that this hypothesis is a constitutive element of free will theodicies. But if we are concerned with morally significant free will, the kind of environment postulated by H7 is necessary for the exercise of such free will.

⁴⁵   For example, are horrific evils such as the Holocaust too high a price to pay for free will, or the goods free will makes possible? The free will theodicist may reply by pointing to an incommensurably good eschatological scenario (e.g., eternal felicity with God) that cannot be actualized or cannot have any value unless it is freely chosen. But this will not do. Consider, for example, a world in which all people always exercise their freedom in evil ways, and as a result lead thoroughly miserable lives and die unrepentant. Whatever value free will may have, it surely cannot be great enough to outweigh the evil done and suffered in such a world. But if the value of free will is tied to its results, the theist is faced with the following difficult case: Paul chooses to lead a life of moral depravity and, as a result, his life is marked by mental and physical anguish (cases like this are, of course, not uncommon in our world). What goods can be invoked to justify God's creation of people such as Paul? Soul-making is not an option since Paul's life is one of moral disintegration, and a heavenly afterlife is also ruled out given Paul's immoral character. There are at least two possible

escape-routes for the theist. First, one may take the currently popular route of 'open theism' by deny-
ing that God knows what every creature he might create would freely do in any possible situation, in
which case God has no way of ensuring that his providential plan for each person will ultimately suc-
ceed. The difficulty here is that God's providential control of the world need not be based on his
knowledge of would-conditionals, but on would-probably conditionals (e.g., in circumstances *C*,
Paul would *probably* freely commit murder). An open theist, however, may even deny that it is pos-
sible to know or predict (at least very far in advance) what libertarian free creatures would probably
do. But now God is open to the charge of reckless risk-taking: if the knowledge that God needs to
providentially govern the world cannot be had, then his decision to create a world looks reckless.

Second, the theist may adopt a universalist eschatology. Apart from the difficulty of recon-
ciling universalism with (libertarian) freedom, it is not clear how God's knowledge that Paul-like
creatures will eventually be saved justifies him in permitting them to lead a miserable existence on
earth. Indeed, the theist who adopts this second alternative is tacitly presupposing a Molinist
understanding of divine omniscience, in which case it is incumbent on the theist to explain why
God, possessing such a high degree of knowledge and hence power, could not create a world pop-
ulated entirely by moral saints.

What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomena epitomized by the species on Darwin's Galápagos Islands? The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror … Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history are like, He is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not a loving God who cares about His productions. He is not even the awful God portrayed in the book of Job. The God of the Galápagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.

(David L. Hull, "The God of the Galápagos," p. 486)

11.   THEODICIES FOR NATURAL EVIL

Moving from moral evil to natural evil, the bold (some would say foolish) thesis I wish to defend in this chapter is that *theism is wholly incapable of accounting for any instance, kind, amount, or distribution of natural evil.* Many would find this view unpalatable, for it is widely assumed that it would not be overly difficult to extend one of the well-known theodicies for moral evil – such as Hick's soul-making theodicy – to account for at least some very minor natural evils, such as a fleeting toothache. This perspective on natural evil has, I suspect, become dominant within contemporary philosophy of religion because of some pernicious tendencies in theodical discussions of natural evil, in particular: (a) the failure to specify in a sufficiently clear and precise fashion the intension and extension of the concepts of 'moral evil' and 'natural evil', and (b) the construction of theodicies for natural evil independently from theodicies for moral evil, thus obscuring from one's view the possibility that the goods one claims are secured by natural evil may just as well be secured by moral evil.[1] To redress these tendencies I will work with a reasonably precise understanding of the categories of 'moral evil' and 'natural evil' (as elaborated in Chapter 2, Section 2.1.1). I will then proceed to evaluate three influential theodicies for natural evil, and this will be done in the light of the prior assumption (defended in the previous chapter) that any world created by God must be one in which a great deal of moral evil is possible in order that certain greater goods, such as free will and soul-making, may be realized. In particular, I will consider the prospects of the following theistic attempts to account for natural evil: Hick's soul-making theodicy, Swinburne's free will theodicy, and the natural law theodicy developed by Bruce Reichenbach. My focus, however, will not be on horrendous natural evil (or HNE) exclusively, but rather on natural evil of any amount and variety. Although not specifically required to do so for the purpose of evaluating the factual

premise of Rowe's argument, I aim to show that the best (or at least some of
the best) currently available theodicies for natural evil do not have the
resources to refute the following claim:

(1) No good state of affairs justifies God in permitting NE, where NE
represents any natural evil at all – that is, any instance, kind, quan-
tity, or distribution of natural evil.

1   SOUL-MAKING AND NATURAL EVIL

Beginning with the soul-making theodicy, it may be granted that evil of
some sort is required in order to create the kind of environment that would
facilitate our moral and spiritual growth. But would not moral evil alone suf-
fice for this purpose? Why would natural evil be needed in addition to moral
evil? It is important to bear in mind that, according to the conception of 'nat-
ural evil' adopted in this study, an event is a natural evil only if it has been
caused solely or mainly by the operation of the laws of nature or by non-
culpable human action or negligence – in either case no human agent can be
held morally responsible for the evil in question. For example, a famine
brought about by a drought that occurred as a result of the process of global
warming would not be categorized as a natural evil, at least if global warm-
ing is the product of culpable human pollution. On the other hand, the death
of the fawn in $E2$ can be viewed as a natural evil, as it was caused by a forest
fire that was created by a lightning strike (assuming, of course, that humans
were in no way morally responsible for the occurrence of lightning). There-
fore, a world without 'natural evil', as this term has just been explicated, may
well contain great natural disasters – these, however, will always be traceable
to the misuse of free will on the part of humans.

But would a world without any natural evil provide enough opportunities
for soul-making? To help answer this question, I will briefly describe some of
the more important features of such a world, which I will dub 'Eden':

The Eden World:

(a)   Eden – which names an entire universe, not a particular planet – is as
similar as possible to the universe we live in ('the actual world'). Each uni-
verse would therefore have a similar material constitution – that is to say, each
would be populated by similar physical objects, whether these be liquids,
metals, gases, plants, animals, stars, solar systems, or the subatomic particles
that make up all these objects. Furthermore, the causal laws governing the
behaviour of matter are as similar as possible in each world, but differ in one

important respect to be mentioned below. Finally, the size and structure of both worlds would not be markedly different.

(b) There is a planet in Eden resembling our planet Earth – call it 'Twin Earth'. Almost everything we see on Earth, from its rivers and mountains to its plant and animal life, is replicated as close as possible on Twin Earth. Also found on Twin Earth are human beings with a biological and psychological make-up that is not significantly different to that of their counterparts on Earth (this is not to suggest, however, that each human on Earth has a Lewisian counterpart on Twin Earth). Whatever differences there are between the respective species of each planet are supervenient upon the point of dissimilarity given in (c).

(c) The crucial difference between Eden and the actual world is that in the former, but not in the latter, there is no evil caused solely or mainly by natural processes. All evil in Eden is moral evil – that is to say, the inhabitants of Eden (specifically, the morally autonomous agents of Eden) are morally responsible for all the evil that exists. In Eden, therefore, there are no 'naturally occurring' disasters – a plague or flood, for example, can only be brought about by the freely chosen acts or omissions of some human person(s). Furthermore, in Eden no-one is born with genetic defects that cause illnesses such as cancer or Down's Syndrome, unless some person is morally responsible for allowing or bringing about the genetic defect in question (e.g., a drug addicted mother giving birth to a drug addicted baby).

(d) Given the dissimilarity between Eden and the actual world identified in (c), two further important differences may be mentioned:

(i)   The law of predation that is operative on Earth – that is, the law that animals must kill and devour each other in order to survive – cannot hold on Twin Earth. The nomic necessity of predation entails the existence of natural evil, in particular the suffering of animals caused solely by non-moral agents (viz., other animals). But there is no natural evil in Eden, and so the law of predation must be absent from Twin Earth.

(ii) The evolutionary process that took place on Earth could not have taken place on Twin Earth. Evolution via natural selection presupposes the existence of a great deal of natural evil, much of which is attributable to the law of predation. Therefore, no Darwinian type of evolutionary theory can be true in Eden (this, however, is not to rule out the possibility that some form of evolutionary process may be at work in Eden).

This brief depiction of a world without natural evil makes it clear that such a world would be far from a hedonistic paradise. Eden, in spite of its name,

may be plagued by all manner of moral evils. It must be admitted, however, that the total amount of evil would most likely be less in Eden than in the actual world, not only because there is no natural evil in Eden but also because much moral evil is influenced or caused by natural evil. The question, therefore, may be raised as to whether the amount of evil in Eden is sufficient to sustain the soul-making process. It may be argued, for example, that a world like Eden would be too 'soft' or unchallenging. Richard Swinburne, for one, writes:

> Just imagine all the suffering of mind and body caused by disease, earthquake, and accident unpreventable by humans removed at a stroke from our society. No sickness, no bereavement in consequence of the untimely death of the young. Many of us would then have such an easy life that we simply would not have much opportunity to show courage or, indeed, manifest much in the way of great goodness at all.[2]

One may add that a world devoid of natural evil would fail to preserve the epistemic distance between humans and God, for it is natural evil that largely contributes to the religiously ambiguous nature of the world. In short, a world without natural evil would not be conducive to God's purpose of building 'souls'.

The problem with this line of thought is that it overlooks the many similarities between Eden and the actual world, and in particular between Earth and Twin Earth. Like Earth, Twin Earth would be populated by people comprising various races, language groups, and cultures. Twin Earthers would also share the degree of free will that we possess as well as our other psychological traits, so that ignorance and immorality would be just as much a defining characteristic of their history as of ours. Furthermore, the natural resources of Twin Earth (e.g., oil, gas, coal) may be just as scarce and unevenly distributed as in our planet. There is no reason why Twin Earth, simply because it lacks natural evil, would guarantee a life of plenty for each person. In that case, Twin Earthers may be motivated by, for example, greed or self-interest to bring about evils such as poverty, famine, and unemployment. The fact that they inhabit a comparatively better regulated natural system does not entail that they would be less prone than us (at least to any significant extent) to greedily protecting their wealth, to polluting their environment, to building oppressive political regimes, to committing murder and rape, and so on. This is why statements such as the above quote from Swinburne are, at best, misleading: it is simply false that once natural evil is abolished, so are such evils as ill health and untimely death. It seems, then, that the amount of evil in Twin Earth, although substantially

less than that found on Earth, is unlikely to be so small as to be insufficient for soul-making.[3]

But what about epistemic distance in Eden? The question here is whether the fact that the laws of nature in Eden are entirely benevolent (in the sense that they cannot on their own give rise to pain and suffering) necessarily implies that the inhabitants of Eden are placed in a situation of epistemic immediacy with God. As pointed out in Chapter 8, Hick understands this kind of epistemic immediacy as a threat to our freedom, for on his view if God were overwhelmingly evident to us we could not freely choose to enter into a relationship of love with God. But how could 'benevolent' causal laws alone suffice to create such a situation of epistemic immediacy? David O'Connor, while speculating on the implications of an Eden-like world, correctly notes that "what would be known [in such a world] is that there was no literally accidental or morally neutral pain or suffering in that world. But it does not follow that it would also be known that this was because of divine intervention in nature."[4] Indeed, if moral evil were rampant in Eden, many would be inclined on this basis to deny the existence of a perfectly loving God. Moreover, there is nothing to prevent the various human populations of Twin Earth in developing different conceptions of the divine and thus different religions, which in turn would help foster the religious ambiguity required for epistemic distance.

2   SWINBURNE'S FREE WILL THEODICY

If the foregoing is correct, then natural evil of any amount and of any kind is not necessary for the purpose of soul-making. It may, nevertheless, be argued that natural evil is in some way required for the possession of free will. Of course, free will only makes possible moral evil, not natural evil. But it may be held that we could not have free will, and hence the goods free will bestows on us, without the existence of at least some natural evil. A sophisticated argument of this sort has been developed by Richard Swinburne, and so it is to this that I now turn.

In a number of writings, but most prominently in *The Existence of God*, Swinburne has put forward what he calls 'the argument from the need for knowledge' in defence of God's permission of natural evil.[5] This argument, which is a variant of the free will theodicy, runs as follows:

(2) If an agent *S* is to freely bring about a good or evil state of affairs, *S* must know how to bring about this state of affairs.

This is a seemingly uncontroversial premise. Without the knowledge of how to bring about good or evil we would not have the ability to (intentionally) do good or evil. But if we lack the ability to (intentionally) do good or evil, we thereby lack the freedom (in a responsibility-entailing sense) to act in a good or bad way.

(3) An agent *S* cannot know how to bring about a good or evil state of affairs without knowing what consequences would follow from her actions.

Again, this appears incontestable: I know how to kill Jones only if I know that my doing certain things (e.g., adding cyanide to Jones' drink) will result in the death of Jones.

(4) The only way for *S* to come to know the consequences of her actions is by means of induction from past experience.

This has been the greatest bone of contention amongst critics of Swinburne's argument, and so I will come back to it later.

(5) For any evil one person intentionally inflicts on another (or, more generally, for any token of moral evil), there must have been a first time in history when this was done.

For example, there must have been, as Swinburne says, "a first murder, a first murder by cyanide poisoning, a first deliberate humiliation, and so on."[6]

(6) Given the truth of (4), the person committing the moral evil on that first occasion can only learn about the evil consequences of her intended action by induction from past experience, where this involves either
(a) observing such evil consequences resulting from past human actions, including her own past actions (or being informed of such observations made by others), or
(b) observing such evil consequences occurring 'naturally' – that is, without being caused by intentional human action (or being informed of such observations made by others).
(7) However, the acquisition of the requisite knowledge by means of option (a) is not possible, since *ex hypothesi* the moral evil in question has never been actualized in the past.

(8) Therefore, the only way for the requisite knowledge to be acquired is by means of option (b), that is to say, by observation of some natural evil.

(9) Therefore, an agent *S* cannot know how to bring about a good or evil state of affairs without the existence of natural evil.

To illustrate premises (6)–(9), take the first murder by cyanide poisoning. The murderer in question could not have arrived at her knowledge that cyanide causes death after witnessing someone killing another person by dropping cyanide in their drink. For then murder by cyanide would have occurred in the past, and this (we are assuming) has not happened. Our murderer, therefore, can only acquire the requisite knowledge by her having seen or someone having told her that cyanide accidentally led to death. Such accidents, however, are natural evils, and so the knowledge in question presupposes (direct or indirect) acquaintance with natural evil.

(10) Therefore, the freedom to bring about a good or evil state of affairs cannot be had by an agent unless there exists some natural evil.

Since free will cannot be had without the knowledge of how to bring about evil (or prevent its occurrence), and since this knowledge of how to cause evil can only be had through prior experience with natural evil, it follows that the existence of natural evil is a logically necessary condition for the exercise of free will. Natural evil, for example, provides us with the knowledge (if we choose to seek it, of course) that rabies can cause death, and given this knowledge we have various choices open to us: we can choose to prevent such deaths, or we can negligently allow them to occur, or we can even deliberately bring them about. In short, freedom of choice requires knowledge of effects, which in turn requires the existence of natural evil. As Swinburne puts it:

> If men are to have the opportunity to bring about serious evils for themselves or others by actions or negligence, or to prevent their occurrence, and if all knowledge of the future is obtained by normal induction, that is by induction from patterns of similar events in the past – then there must be serious natural evils occurring to man or animals.[7]

The Controversy Over Premise (4) – The central difficulty with Swinburne's argument appears to lie with premise (4), the claim that we can only come to know the consequences of our actions by means of induction from past experience. (This is not to rule out testimony as a source of such knowledge; but testimony itself will ultimately be derived from induction.)

The inductive evidence, as Swinburne explains, normally consists of patterns of similar events in the past which license an inductive inference to how events are likely to succeed each other in the future. The strength of such an inference – and hence the degree of (epistemic) justification that attaches to the belief it occasions – depends on a number of factors, including the following:

- My belief about what will happen in the future is more justified the more past data I have used to draw the relevant inference to the future.
- My belief is better justified if it is based on recent observations (rather than observations remote in time that may, for example, have been misrecorded) and on observations made under varied conditions.
- The less reason I have to doubt that the events mentioned in the data occurred as stated (which would be the case, for example, if the data consist of past experiences of mine), the better grounded is my claim to knowledge of the future.
- The more my set of data are qualitatively dissimilar from the kind of phenomenon predicted, thus requiring a complicated scientific theory to generate the prediction, the greater the doubt that will accrue to my claim to knowledge.[8]

The point behind these criteria is encapsulated in Swinburne's slogan, "proximity to experience gives more certain knowledge."[9] To illustrate, assume that if I drink five glasses of whisky in two hours I will be unable to drive my car safely. In Swinburne's view, this would be most surely known by me if it were based on my own past experience, less surely known if based on my having seen it happen to others, less surely again if based on reports made by, say, the police drawn from their observations of others, and least surely known if it were a remote prediction of a complex scientific theory. Claims to inductive knowledge, therefore, are better justified the closer they are to our experience. It follows, then, that knowledge, or at least very well justified true beliefs, regarding the consequences of our actions can only be had through prior experience of such consequences.[10]

Swinburne may be correct in holding that induction by past experience is the primary, if not the only, way we acquire knowledge of the consequences of our actions. He has been widely criticized, however, for going on to make the far stronger claim (in premise (4) above) that induction is *the only logically possible way* for us to acquire the requisite knowledge. Here is a list of some of the alternative routes to knowledge of the future as suggested by critics or even by Swinburne himself.

Supernatural sources of knowledge of the future:

1. *Universal divine revelation*: God conveys to each of us knowledge of the consequences of our actions by means of verbal communication. This would involve God "saying out loud such things as 'if you walk near the cliff, you will fall over', or 'if you want to kill your neighbour, cyanide is very effective'."[11]

2. *Special revelation*: God reveals the required information by granting certain individuals (e.g., prophets, saints) with unique insight into the consequences of people's actions, and this serves as a source of knowledge for the rest of the community.[12]

3. *Angels*: Paul Moser suggests that "God could delegate the responsibility of giving us the relevant successful predictions to some super-human agent who is capable of giving us the needed knowledge via verbal communication."[13]

4. *A 'knowledge machine' or oracle*: God populates the world with machines or oracles that correctly predict the consequences of our actions. For example, one may type into the machine the words, 'Will anyone suffer if I give them 30 gm of cyanide, and how will they suffer?', and the reply would be something like, 'They will suffer great physical pain leading to death and their spouse will suffer bereavement'.[14]

5. *Message-laden dreams or visions*: God provides the necessary information through dreams or veridical visions. For instance, God gives "the president of the relevant labor union a violently vivid dream in which he appears to see in grisly detail workers exposed to asbestos subsequently suffering with the symptoms of asbestosis."[15]

6. *Innate knowledge*: God ensures that each of us is born with the needed data implanted in our brains, so that whenever we desired something wrong the appropriate information would come into our consciousness.[16]

Swinburne rejects the first proposal of acquiring knowledge of the future by means of direct divine revelation, for he maintains that this would thwart human freedom. His argument in support of this claim is examined in detail in Chapter 8 (Section 3.2.2), but very briefly his view is that regular and direct divine communication of the sort envisaged in this proposal would make it evident to all that God exists. But if it were obvious to us that there is a God, we would regard our every movement as overseen by an all-knowing and perfectly good being. When we also take into account certain good desires we have (e.g., the desire to be well thought of by God, the

desire to avoid punishment), it follows that if God's existence were evident to us, we would have little temptation to do wrong and hence our freedom of choice between good and evil would be lost or significantly diminished.

Swinburne's view is open to at least two objections. One may firstly reply that our free will would not be lost or mitigated if we found ourselves in a situation of epistemic immediacy with God. A response along these lines is developed in Chapter 8. But even if we grant Swinburne that his argument holds with respect to the first case of universal divine revelation, it is not clear that his argument also holds in the other five cases. Consider, for example, the sixth case involving innate knowledge. If we were equipped with innate knowledge of the evil effects of our choices, this would not necessarily lead us to believe that God is the source of this knowledge (unless, of course, it is part of our innate knowledge that God is the source of the relevant information – but there is no reason why this further fact would need to be revealed to us).[17]

Swinburne is not unaware of this kind of objection, but he dismisses it on the grounds that beliefs about the future formed innately or spontaneously would not be as strongly justified (i.e., justified in an objective, externalist sense) as beliefs based on induction from past experience. As Swinburne states,

> My belief B that if I set light to hydrogen there will be an explosion is far better justified if it is not a basic belief, but justified by many beliefs to the effect that I have observed that when I have set light to hydrogen in the past (or it has accidentally caught light) there has been an explosion.[18]

This view, of course, derives from Swinburne's general thesis that, in matters of contingent fact, "proximity to experience gives more certain knowledge." It is doubtful, however, that this thesis, even if accepted, vindicates Swinburne's position. For as David O'Connor has pointed out, even though beliefs that are formed innately may not initially be well justified (despite being true), their justification would be strengthened once they are corroborated by the experiences of those who act on those beliefs. Such beliefs would then amount to knowledge, and this knowledge would be based, in part, on experience.[19] Swinburne, on the other hand, objects:

> If I have always done actions with effects of a certain kind – for example, actions whose short-term effects concern only myself, or the physical well-being of those close to me, or actions such that I have basic beliefs only about their good effects – there will remain a doubt about whether my basic beliefs about the effects of actions with effects of other kinds are equally trustworthy.[20]

But then, adds Swinburne,

> … in so far as there is a justified doubt about which effects our actions will have, we can evade the moral force of a choice between good and bad on the ground that it is not certain which effects our actions will have. The less serious the effects, the less serious the choice. If there is a doubt about whether smoking causes cancer, it is less evidently a bad thing to smoke.[21]

On the innate knowledge hypothesis, however, any doubt that may accrue to my basic or innate beliefs about the effects of actions I have never performed can be removed after (a) having frequently acted on such beliefs and thus having my intuitions confirmed, or (b) having observed others acting in similar ways and consequently producing the very effects I expected, or (c) having been told by others that people have acted in a similar way and consequently produced the expected effects. Indeed, as far as actions I have never performed are concerned, my doubts about the effects of such actions would be no smaller (or greater, for that matter) were my knowledge of the effects based entirely on induction rather than on induction plus intuition.

Let's assume, however, that Swinburne is correct in claiming that each of the above six supernatural sources of knowledge would either remove freedom of choice or produce beliefs about the effects of action that could never amount to knowledge. There remains, nonetheless, the possibility of *non-supernatural* sources of knowledge of the future. Eleonore Stump has suggested one such possibility:

> We can learn about the effects of exposure to asbestos in altogether natural ways, without relying on evidence from natural evils, by conducting scientific tests.[22]

Such tests could be performed on either animals or humans, or both. The results of these experiments would provide us with the requisite knowledge, and no-one would have died of asbestos unintentionally or accidentally in the process. Assuming (as I think it is plausible to do) that such experiments are morally evil[23], it may be objected that Stump is merely replacing one evil (the natural evil of people contracting asbestosis without this being caused intentionally by any person) with another evil (the moral evil of deliberately exposing sentient creatures to asbestos). But it is preferable, the objector adds, to seek a procedure for acquiring the requisite knowledge of the future that involves a reduction in the overall amount of natural evil without a concomitant increase in the overall amount of moral evil. The objector, however,

would be mistaken. For even if some procedure for arriving at the requisite knowledge comes at the price of increasing the amount of moral evil, surely we would be happy to pay that price if we are also guaranteed a world containing (a) no natural evil and (b) a favourable balance of good over evil. And there does not seem to be any reason for thinking that a world exhibiting qualities (a) and (b) cannot also be one in which Stump's knowledge-acquisition procedure is operative.[24]

An alternative criticism that might be made of Stump's proposal is that if no-one ever suffered from asbestosis we would see no need to conduct scientific tests regarding the effects of asbestos exposure. Stump, however, disagrees:

> Scientific understanding of biology … is sufficient to warrant caution about any significant alteration of an animal's biological or chemical environment. We do not need naturally produced deaths from microwave sickness in order to realize the possible dangers of exposure to microwaves, for example; and we can test the results of such exposure and take precautions against its effects *before* anyone dies of it.[25]

But is this right? If no-one ever suffered, let alone died, from being exposed to a particular substance, then what could motivate us to test the effects of exposure to that substance *other than sheer scientific curiosity*? At least one line of response is to suggest that God could have made us more curious or more scientifically inclined, in which case scientific experimentation would have obviated the need for natural evil. There may therefore be some way to develop Stump's hypothesis as to how the requisite knowledge can be acquired in a world lacking in natural evil so as to render the hypothesis invulnerable to criticisms like the foregoing.

I would like to suggest, however, a different and perhaps more promising avenue for obtaining knowledge of the effects of our actions, one that has been overlooked by critics of Swinburne. Like Stump's proposal, it is a purely naturalistic method of knowledge acquisition, one we employ quite often. In short, it is the method of *trial-and-error*. To explore this method, let's return for a moment to Eden, our imaginary world lacking natural evil. Suppose that a mature adult on Twin Earth, call him 'Adam', forms the desire to kill his partner Eve, but does not know how to do so. However, driven by his strong (perhaps irrational) desire, he tries a number of things, eventually getting it right by hitting her head repeatedly against a brick wall.[26] And if he observes many others behaving in similar ways with similar results, he would clearly come to know how to commit murder. For his belief about the effects of the action in question would then possess the required 'proximity

to experience' so as to constitute knowledge. Once this trial-and-error method has been repeated a sufficiently large number of times over successive generations, there seems to be no reason why all, or at least most, of the moral evils found in our world will not have been learnt by the Twin Earthers (we may need to assume, however, that the Twin Earthers' level of intellectual and technological sophistication is similar to ours).[27]

There does remain a slight problem, one that David O'Connor has emphasized.[28] Even in a world like Eden, people would be disposed to some extent to do both good and evil (Adam could not have formed the desire to kill unless he was first disposed to do evil). But is not the mere disposition to do evil a 'natural evil'? Such a disposition is not a moral evil, for it is innate – in this regard, it is unlike the intention to do evil or the performance of an evil action, both of which can be freely chosen. But then Eden would contain some natural evil after all. It seems more plausible, however, to regard our natural or inbuilt dispositions as morally neutral, as being neither good nor evil. It is how we cultivate these dispositions, rather than the dispositions themselves, that is morally relevant.[29]

In conclusion, then, Swinburne's free will theodicy, just as much as Hick's soul-making theory, fails to provide a plausible justification for God's permission of natural evil.[30]

3   REICHENBACH'S NATURAL LAW THEODICY

According to Bruce Reichenbach's natural law theodicy, the natural evils that befall humans and animals are the unavoidable by-products of the outworking of the natural laws governing God's creation.[31] To provide some support for this position, Reichenbach divides the possible worlds which God could have created into three groups:

(11)   God could have created either
    W_1: the actual world we inhabit with its natural laws, or
    W_2: a world in which God regularly intervenes to prevent natural evils, or
    W_3: a world with natural laws that never produce (through their operation alone) human and animal suffering in that world.

Reichenbach then proceeds to show that worlds W_2 and W_3 are not viable alternatives for God. To begin with W_2, he argues that in a world which operates according to continuous divine intervention the necessary relation between cause and effect is abrogated, thus making events unpredictable

and rational predictions, calculations and decisions impossible. But then we could not know what course of action to take in order to achieve our goals, and so we would be prevented from forming or carrying out our moral intentions, whether these be good or bad. A regular natural order is therefore a prerequisite for a moral order.[32] Reichenbach is thus led to state that

(12) It is unreasonable for God to regularly intervene in a world which operates according to natural laws.

(13) (Therefore) W_2 is not a plausible option for God.[33]

This seems to be the strongest point in Reichenbach's theodicy, although it has come under fire by some.[34] The next part of the theodicy, on the other hand, is far more contentious. Even if God could not be expected to remove natural evil by way of miraculous intervention, perhaps he could create a different natural system in which natural evil never arises in the first place. As H.J. McCloskey has maintained,

There is no reason why better laws of nature governing the existing objects are not possible on the divine hypothesis. Surely, if God is all-powerful, He could have made a better universe in the first place, or one with better laws of nature governing it, so that the operation of its laws did not produce calamities and pain.[35]

Likewise, Edward Madden and Peter Hare write:

A God unlimited in power and goodness certainly could have created a world with somewhat different laws than the present ones which would have produced much the same good results and avoided much of the gratuitous evil.[36]

Reichenbach, however, objects that

(14) A world like W_3 governed by natural laws that are significantly different from those operating in the actual world would be worse overall than the actual world.

(15) (Therefore) W_3 is not a plausible option for God.

The rest of Reichenbach's theodicy then follows as a matter of course:

(16) (Therefore) In creating a world, God had to create W_1 – that is, the present world with its natural laws.

(17) But a world governed by the present natural laws inevitably includes natural evil (though the laws and their total effect are good).

(18) (Therefore) Natural evil is unavoidable for an omnipotent, creative being.

(19) (Therefore) God is not morally accountable or blameworthy for natural evil.

Here I wish to focus on premise (14), the claim that a world with radically different and more benign natural laws would be inferior to the actual world. Reichenbach's defence of (14) begins with the view that a world with radically different laws would be occupied with entities substantially different from those inhabiting our world. As he puts it,

> To change the actual world sufficiently to eliminate natural evils, and therefore to instantiate a possible world with different natural laws, would necessarily entail a change in existing objects themselves. They would have to be different in some essential respects, such that with different essential properties they would become different things altogether. Fire would no longer burn or else many things would have to be by nature non-combustible; lightning would have to have a lower voltage or else a consistent repulsion from objects; wood would have to be penetrable so that limbs or trees would not injure.[37]

Reichenbach then applies this line of reasoning to human beings. If the world were governed by natural laws that render the occurrence of natural evil causally impossible, human nature would be changed in significant ways. In fact, on Reichenbach's view, a world like W_3 operating according to different natural laws would entail the non-existence of human beings and, moreover, the non-existence of any significantly free, conscious, and sentient creatures. But given that the existence of such creatures is a great good (or makes possible many valuable goods), worlds lacking such creatures – such as W_3 – would, other things being equal, be inferior in value to worlds populated by such creatures (e.g., the actual world, W_1).

Reichenbach's claim that W_3-like worlds are unfit for human existence is predicated on the observation that humans are essentially "sentient creatures of nature."[38] By this he means that humans are "constructed of the same substance as Nature," and so they "cause natural events and in turn are affected by natural events."[39] But these natural events, Reichenbach adds, will sometimes be propitious towards human life and sometimes not. And so, insofar as humans are sentient creatures interacting with nature, they will occasionally be affected by the forces of nature in unfortunate ways. To prevent this – that

is, to prevent natural evils from affecting humans – would require a significant alteration in human nature. In fact, humans would need to be removed from the causal influence of nature, and this would entail the elimination of *human* beings altogether. But Reichenbach also contends that the existence of any finite moral agent, human or non-human, would be threatened in a world with laws of nature that render natural evil impossible. If, for example, non-physical persons were created instead of humans, the finitude of these imma-terial beings would remain a source of natural evil for them. For given their finitude, they would be capable of experiencing "frustration, anxiety, intellec-tual limitations, and perhaps even mental dysfunctions."[40] It seems, then, that a world devoid of natural evil will also be devoid of any finite, morally autonomous creatures.

Two major difficulties may be isolated in Reichenbach's argument. First, his claim regarding the necessity of natural evil for the existence of human beings (as we know them, i.e., as natural beings) is grounded on a fallacious inference. Reichenbach begins with the premise that humans, insofar as they are an integral part of the natural system, will necessarily be causally affected by nature. But then he draws the unwarranted inference that humans, being part of the natural world, will at times be affected *adversely* by the forces of nature. This, however, is only contingently true. It could have been the case that the laws of nature are such that they never (through their operation alone) bring about any human and animal suffer-ing. Perhaps in such a world there would be no *humans*, particularly if the experience of natural evil (or the potential to experience such evil) is essen-tial to being human. But that is no problem – there would simply be, in worlds like Eden, beings resembling humans in that they are free creatures capable of growing morally and spiritually. And there seems to be no reason why such creatures would be any less valuable than human beings.

The second difficulty with Reichenbach's case lies with his attempt to extend his argument to all finite moral agents, whether they be human or not. Finitude, according to Reichenbach, is itself a source of natural evil. But it is not clear that finitude is doing all the work here. It seems more plausible to say that a person's finitude in conjunction with the way in which they react to their environment (i.e., how they exercise their free will) determines whether they experience such negative states of mind as frustration and anxiety. In that case, however, these negative states are not natural evils at all.

This brings us to what is perhaps the most important aspect of Reichenbach's theodicy for natural evil. Even if Reichenbach has failed to show that a world governed by different natural laws would be worse over-all than the actual world, he can fall back on a defensive strategy employed by many theists, particularly those in the 'sceptical theist' camp. Indeed,

this is what Reichenbach appears to do when stating that the atheologian will not have debunked his theodicy unless she can show that a world with different natural laws would be a *better* world. But to show this, according to Reichenbach, the atheologian must meet the following conditions:

(a) Develop a possible world-system consisting of different natural laws and/or different objects, and

(b) Show that the system mentioned in (a) – and not just an event or class of events in the system – would result in less evil than the present world-system.[41]

Fulfilling these conditions, however, seems to be beyond the reach of any mere mortal. First, it seems beyond our capabilities to specify, at least with some detail, natural laws that would preserve the goods present in our world (e.g., a stable environment that allows for rational agency) but which do not have natural evil as a by-product. And second, it is impossible to know what the consequences would be if the laws of nature (or the initial, or boundary, conditions upon which they operate) were significantly different. It will not do, for example, to point to an isolated event or a class of events (e.g., arsenic poisonings) and then state that the world would have been better had these events not taken place. For as Reichenbach states, "these classes of improvements affect infinitely many other things, and perhaps for the worse."[42] The emphasis here is on the natural order as a *system*, so that what appears to be a minor change in one part of the order may have far-reaching repercussions throughout the system. Michael Peterson voices this concern quite well:

When the critic requires "only a small change" in the present set of natural laws in order to avoid their gratuitous evil consequences, he might not realize how great a change is involved. Since almost all natural objects are capable of producing harmful as well as beneficial results, virtually all natural laws would have to be modified, with the correlative modification of virtually all natural objects. Even the slightest modification may produce manifold and intricate differences between this present natural order and the envisioned one. The whole matter becomes so complex that no finite mind can conceive of precisely what modifications the envisioned natural world would have to incorporate in order both to preserve the good natural effects and to avoid the fortuitous evil ones. And if the desired modifications cannot be detailed, then the further task of conceiving how the proposed natural world is better than this present one seems patently impossible.[43]

Furthermore, we may take something to be an obvious improvement when in fact it has hidden costs – to quote an example from Reichenbach, "insects once considered only destructive pests are discovered to be essential for plant germination or disease control."[44] Also, calculating the total amount of evil that would result in the alternative world-system, as well as calculating the total amount of evil that exists in this world, is an impossible feat for anyone without knowledge of the entire history of each natural system. Our epistemic limitations, therefore, preclude us from satisfying conditions (a) and (b) above. And so, despite appearances to the contrary, we cannot conceive of a better world – more precisely, we are unable to design a superior world with better natural laws and hence less evil but just as much good as the actual world.[45] It is open to Reichenbach, therefore, to restate premises (14) and (15) of his theodicy thus:

(14′) For all we know, a world like W_3 governed by natural laws that are significantly different from those operating in the actual world would be worse overall than the actual world.

(15′) (Therefore) For all we know, W_3 is not a plausible option for God.

The operator 'For all we know' would then be appended to premises (16), (18), and (19) as well. Since these premises are only held to be epistemically possible with no claim to plausibility being made, Reichenbach's theodicy becomes in effect a mere defence. Although this places us beyond the realm of theodicy proper, it will be interesting to briefly examine the merits of this defensive maneuver.

Reichenbach's scepticism regarding our ability to conceive of better worlds is instructive. For one thing, it alerts us to the fact that, before claiming to have imagined a 'better' world, we need to think deeply about the kinds of natural laws that would be operative in the alternate world, and to follow through as far as possible the consequences there might be in any modification of the present laws. Thus, proposals for better worlds, such as the brief account of the Eden world provided in Section 1 above, will not be entirely adequate until the thought experiment has been carried through to the very end.

At the same time, however, one must not expect too much from such proposals. In putting forward some alternative laws of nature, it is unreasonable to ask for a great amount of detail. Peter van Inwagen, for instance, writes that the "physicists' actual formulations of quantum field theories and the general theory of relativity provide the standard of required 'detail'."[46] Clearly, that is expecting too much. Most of us are quite familiar with the kind of world we live in (or the way it operates) without understanding much about quantum theory and the theory of relativity. It would

be more reasonable to only request a specification of the general features of the alternative world, where this includes making comparisons and contrasts to the actual world and working through some of the consequences of modifying the actual laws of nature. Put otherwise, what is required is a blueprint for a *set* or *class* of worlds, not for one specific world.

So, can even this much be done? Perhaps what is needed most here is a bit of imagination, maybe the kind exhibited by science-fiction writers. But there is no need to stray too far from reality. Let's return to Eden. The laws of nature there cannot, through their operation alone, cause any human or animal suffering. That alone renders Eden a very different world occupied by very different objects. Using our 'Jules Verne-o-scope', let's zoom in on Twin Earth and its human inhabitants (some may prefer not to call them human; even so, we can still characterize them as intelligent, free and moral agents of some sort). They need not be immortal; they may live longer than most of us, but we can imagine them dying – either peacefully (if nature takes its course) or violently at the hands of others. Given the absence of natural evil, they will not be subject to many of our physical pains. Toothaches, for example, would never have a purely natural cause (e.g., improper growth of 'wisdom teeth'), but would rather be caused by, for example, being deliberately punched in the mouth or having poor dietary habits. Twin Earthers would also be free from the ravages of naturally occurring disasters such as earthquakes, floods, and fires. In short, their physiology together with their natural and social environment would set them apart from us in many significant ways. Nevertheless, humans on Twin Earth would not be totally unrecognizable to us. They may share many of our ethical values, as well as most of our needs and wants (e.g., the need for food, friendship, sex, sleep). We can imagine, for example, that the need for food and drink will not disappear. But Twin Earthers would not be alerted to the need for replenishment through hunger pangs, as such pangs are natural evils. Instead, they may find themselves spontaneously forming the belief that they require replenishment. Alternatively, their bodies may come equipped with something like a fuel gauge that indicates when food or drink is required and sends a (non-painful) warning when levels become dangerously low. If this warning is not heeded, then a painful starvation process sets in. Unlike the actual world, however, on Twin Earth the starvation process never begins (or continues) unless some fellow human being is morally responsible for bringing this about. It seems possible, then, to imagine with some concreteness what we would have been like had there been no natural evil. To reiterate, the only limitation here appears to be one's imagination.

What about non-human natural kinds? Carnivores, such as tigers, would be herbivores on Twin Earth, thus abolishing the law of predation. Animal suffering, however, is not precluded, though it would only occur by means

of culpable human action or negligence. Of course, essentialists may refuse to call a herbivorous animal a 'tiger'. But there is no need to quibble over names; we could call them 'tiger-counterparts': they look like tigers but their genetic make-up is such that they obtain nourishment only by vegetables and not by meat.

Unlike the animate world, there is no need to think of inanimate objects on Twin Earth as being in any way different from inanimate objects on Earth. Water on Twin Earth, for example, would retain its power to drown someone who does not wish to be drowned and who is not intentionally drowned by another person. On Twin Earth, however, the laws of nature are such that accidental drownings – and, indeed, any accidents that bring about suffering or death – simply never take place. It is at this point that some critics are likely to object that I have transgressed the bounds of plausibility. For in what sense can the laws governing Twin Earth be said to be *natural* laws? William Hasker, for example, states that "it is a defining characteristic of [natural] laws that they operate impersonally and non-teleologically: the chemical properties of water and the tensile strength of steel are not respectors of persons."[47] Hasker is here responding to a suggestion made by Stanley Kane to the effect that, in an improved version of the actual world, material objects like water and steel "could behave just as they do now except in those circumstances where doing so would bring physical harm to any of these [human and other sentient] beings, and in these circumstances they would behave in a wholly harmless fashion."[48] Hasker may be right that the laws governing Kane's world are not natural laws. But Kane's world is not Twin Earth. If you are hit in the mouth by a baseball on Twin Earth, it does not follow that you will not experience any pain unless you were hit intentionally. Similarly, water on Twin Earth does not have the curious property of drowning someone only if the drowning were deliberate. To reinforce this point, consider the following hypothetical case:

> A family is enjoying a picnic near a lake when one of their children, a five-year-old boy, catches a glimpse of a duck paddling on the water. Without anybody noticing, the boy runs towards the lake and, in an attempt to get hold of the duck, falls into the water and quickly drowns.

The child's death is clearly accidental. If this event were 'replayed' on Twin Earth, however, it must not be presumed that the child would fall into the lake but not drown. Instead, the child would not run towards the lake in the first place. Perhaps children on Twin Earth have a strong natural aversion towards large expanses of water, so that they would be afraid to go anywhere near lakes, rivers, or beaches (at least on their own, without the assistance of a trusted guardian).

Inanimate objects on Twin Earth therefore have the same powers or liabilities as their counterparts on Earth. It is the nature of animate objects together with the natural laws governing the behaviour of all objects (animate and inanimate) that vary from Earth to Twin Earth. Perhaps, then, the natural laws of Twin Earth can be said to be 'respectors of persons', but only in the innocuous sense that such laws (in conjunction with the properties of living things) prevent any sentient creature from suffering harm brought about in some accidental or non-culpable way.[49]

Admittedly, the account provided of Eden remains sketchy. But enough has been sketched to indicate that an intelligible picture of a world lacking natural evil can be drawn. In particular, it appears that a world where the laws of nature are as close as possible to the present laws but lack the propensity to cause human and animal suffering is not one in which all manner of pain and suffering is absent. Rather, as argued in Section 1, suffering in Eden would exist in sufficient quantities for the purposes of soul-making. Furthermore, the constitution and behaviour of many natural kinds populating our world would be significantly different in Eden. It is difficult to see, however, how the proposed modifications to the natural order would lead to undesirable consequences or the loss of the most significant goods enjoyed in the actual world, particularly freedom of choice and action. At least, it is incumbent on the critic to show that such consequences are likely, a task she cannot consistently complete if she already holds that our epistemic situation prevents us from determining the overall value of even minor modifications to nature.[50]

4   CONCLUSION

My focus in this and the previous chapter has been Rowe's factual premise, or more precisely, the premise undergirding his factual premise, viz., premise *P*: *No good we know of justifies God in permitting E1 and E2*. Rowe states that he finds *P* compelling for the following reason:

> When we reflect on some good we know of we can see that it is very likely, if not certain, that the good in question *either* is not good enough to justify God in permitting *E*1 or *E*2 *or* is such that an omnipotent, omniscient being could realize it (or some greater good) without having to permit *E*1 or *E*2.[51]

Having examined *E*1, *E*2 and like evils in the light of a number of theodicies that make appeal to a variety of known goods, it may be concluded that Rowe's comment is only partly correct. For a free will theodicy, drawing

upon a libertarian conception of free will, supplemented with the ideas of soul-making and a heavenly afterlife, might be sufficient to account for moral evil, even of the horrendous kind. Rowe, however, is entirely correct in his estimation of theodicies for $E2$ and other evils of the natural order. Indeed, a far stronger claim could be made than the one put forward by Rowe. For as I have attempted to show in this chapter, theodicies that make reference to soul-making, free will and natural law fail to identify a God-justifying good not only for horrendous natural evil, but for natural evil of any stripe and any amount. If this is right, then it seems that the commonly held view that at least some natural evil is readily explicable on the theistic hypothesis may need to be reassessed, if not jettisoned. Obviously, Rowe need not make such a strong claim in order to uphold premise P. He could instead hold that, even though some natural evil may be necessary for (say) soul-making, or the acquisition of knowledge of the consequences of our actions, or the operation of a system of natural laws, it is highly implausible that HNE is required for these purposes. Either way, however, the theist faces a formidable challenge, for the 'ways of God' remain inscrutable in relation to at least one very large and important class of evil.[52]

NOTES

[1]   This latter problem is evident in James Petrik, *Evil Beyond Belief* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), ch. 7.

[2]   Swinburne, *Is There A God?* pp. 109–10.

[3]   On pp. 156–58 of *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, Swinburne compares our world with an Eden-like world in which natural evil is entirely absent. He points out that in Eden our bodies (as well as animals, plants, and the inanimate objects we construct) would not be subject to deterioration over time. In that case, the inhabitants of Eden would not be able to bring about evil by negligently allowing something bad to happen (since nature, left to its own devices, could not cause any harm); instead, they could only bring about evil by actively causing it. Our world, by contrast, provides numerous opportunities for wrongdoing merely through sloth. This, in Swinburne's eyes, shows Eden to be inferior to our world. For Eden lacks the good of having "the opportunity of very serious choice (in our actions towards others) without having to desire to hurt, that is to hate our fellows (or animals or the inanimate environment), which is a horrible thing, or even to do anything active (anything which required energy) which will hurt them" (p. 158). Swinburne is correct that in Eden the genesis of any evil E would require active human effort. But the continuation or spread of E may only require inactivity on our behalf. Thus, people in Eden would have the opportunity to allow E to continue unabated merely through sloth, thus making sloth just as much a vice as it is in the actual world. I may add that on my conception of Eden it is not natural deterioration *per se* that is absent, but natural deterioration that causes pain to some sentient creature.

[4]   O'Connor, "Swinburne on Natural Evil from Natural Processes," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 30 (1991): 84.

[5]   Swinburne originally presented this argument in "Natural Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978): 295–301. Subsequently, it has been repeated in *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 202–14; "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," pp. 149–67; *Is There A God?* pp. 107–08; and *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, ch.10, pp. 176–92. It must be noted, however, that the argument from the need for knowledge is only *part* of Swinburne's theodicy for natural evil, which also includes an appeal to 'soul-making' (natural evil as affording various opportunities to develop good desires and character traits). See, in particular, Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 160–71. This bipartite theodicy for natural evil has recently been presented by Swinburne, with some supplementary argumentation, in the second (2004) edition of his *The Existence of God*, pp. 240–57. In what follows, however, I will be relying on the 1991 edition of this work.

[6]   Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 207.

[7]   Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 211. I may point out that the kind of freedom that, in Swinburne's view, is made possible by natural evil is the 'free choice of destiny', where an agent has a choice of destiny if "among the things which he can affect by his free choice are the desire systems and knowledge systems of himself and (to a lesser extent) of his fellows" (Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," p. 150).

[8]   See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., pp. 203–04, and *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 187–88.

[9]   Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 205.

[10]   This is not to deny, however, that in some cases the prior experience from which the induction is made need not be my very own experience. Indeed, as Swinburne points out, in cases involving some of the worst evils the induction can only be made on the basis of the experiences of others. For example, I cannot know by means of my own experience that taking a great deal of heroin over a long period of time will cause death, though I can learn this from seeing it happen to a friend. But even in such cases Swinburne would insist that my knowledge of consequences is 'surer' if it is based on observations I have made as opposed to second-hand reports made on television or in a book. See Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 206.

[11]   Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 211.

[12]   See Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983): 53, where she draws on Jer 42: 1–16.

[13]   Paul Moser, "Natural Evil and the Free Will Defence," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984): 53. In this paper Moser advances a free will theodicy of his own, according to which natural evil is logically necessary not for the acquisition of knowledge of the consequences of our actions, but for the acquisition of the concept of evil. This is an interesting proposal, but one that cannot be examined here. For considerations against Moser's position, see Robert McKim, "Worlds Without Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15 (1984): 164–65, and Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," pp. 155–56; while for considerations in support of Moser, see Michael J. Coughlan, "The Free Will Defence and Natural Evil," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 20 (1986): 102–04.

[14]   See Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," p. 162.

[15]   Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil," p. 52.

[16]   See O'Connor, "Swinburne on Natural Evil," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 72, "On Natural Evil's Being Necessary for Free Will," *Sophia* 24 (1985): 39, and "A Variation on the Free Will Defense," *Faith and Philosophy* 4 (1987): 162.

[17]   Similar comments can be made with respect to methods 2–5 above. In personal communication (dated April 30, 2003), Swinburne has replied that these four methods share the weakness of method 1, viz., the abrogation of epistemic distance. In response to 'knowledge machines', for example, Swinburne writes that "faced with such machines, how (since they show all the signs of consciousness by which we regard other humans as conscious) could we fail to regard them as our conscious guardian angels, and therefore approximating to the status of Divinity – with all the disadvantages of the method of direct divine inspiration." But as with the innate knowledge hypothesis, the deliverances of the knowledge machine would provide one with few, if any, clues as to the nature of their source – and this because the information communicated is of a purely factual sort, as opposed to consisting of, say, moral exhortations. (It seems that the same point can also be made in relation to method 1.)

[18]   Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 180. Cf. Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," pp. 158–59, where the stronger view is advanced that a basic or innate belief (regarding the effects of one's action) would lack any justification at all.

[19]   See O'Connor, "Swinburne on Natural Evil from Natural Processes," p. 83, and *God and Inscrutable Evil*, p. 106.

[20]   Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 181.

[21]   *Ibid*., pp. 181–82.

[22]   Stump, "Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil," p. 53.

[23]   The experiments envisioned by Stump ought to be regarded as moral evils even if in some cases the experiments do not result in any suffering at all, while in other cases the suffering produced is unforeseeable and hence unintentional. For the only reason why such experiments would be conducted is to acquire the kind of knowledge that would increase one's capacity to commit moral evil. Echoes of the legend of Dr Faustus, perhaps.

[24]   A similar point is made by Stump in fn. 5 on p. 58 of her 'Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil'.

[25]   Stump, 'Knowledge, Freedom and the Problem of Evil', p. 53, emphasis hers.

[26]   Swinburne has objected to this image on the grounds that "trial and error is … a virtually impossible method unless you have some notion of the range of alternatives within which your trials are likely to have some success … Before it would be rational to undertake trials … one would need to believe that some trial would be more likely to lead to the death of Eve than to the death of Adam" (personal communication, 30 April 2003). But one can imagine Adam forming a hypothesis as to which trials are likely to succeed and then putting this hypothesis to the test. And given that the number of ways one can carry out a murder are virtually infinite, it will not take Adam long to find an effective method for accomplishing his murderous intention. T.J. Mawson has also recently defended the trial-and-error method, though his defence of it leads him to collapse this method with that of method 6 (innate knowledge). See his "The Possibility of a Free-Will Defence for the Problem of Natural Evil," *Religious Studies* 40 (2004): 27–29.

[27]   It may be held that even if induction is not the only way to acquire knowledge of the effects of our actions, it is nevertheless the *best* way. Such a view is implicit in Swinburne's claim that it is only by experiencing the consequences of a particular action that we become fully alert to the consequences of that action – a report (whether oral or written) about the consequences of an intended action will of necessity "fail to capture the detail and bring home the feel of those

consequences" (*The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 213). In addition, it may be argued that knowledge obtained by induction requires experiment and hard co-operative work in order to learn how nature works and so what would be the consequences of our various actions. On the other hand, if knowledge of the effects of our actions were divinely bestowed or available 'on tap', there would be no temptation to act in ignorance, and so the goods of learning from experience and choosing to discover the workings of nature would be forfeited (see Swinburne, "Knowledge from Experience, and the Problem of Evil," p. 163, and *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 182; cf. Coughlan, "The Free Will Defence and Natural Evil," p. 107). I may point out, however, that the two proposals defended above, involving innate knowledge and trial-and-error, are not affected by these lines of thought, since room has been created in each for inductive knowledge.

[28]   See David O'Connor, "On Natural Evil's Being Necessary for Free Will," pp. 40–41.

[29]   It may be objected that our natural dispositions incline us (perhaps strongly) to do more evil than good (our nature is 'fallen', as some theologians would say). In that case, however, that we are endowed with such dispositions cannot be morally irrelevant, but must be thought of as something that is intrinsically bad and hence a natural evil (even if this natural evil serves some greater good). If this view is correct, then my hypothetical Eden world will contain some natural evil after all, but it will not be natural evil of the horrendous kind.

[30]   A further weakness in these theodicies is their failure to account for animal suffering brought about by natural processes (as in *E*2), a problem shared by most natural evil theodicies. According to Hick, animal life (including animal suffering) is necessary to create the optimum epistemic distance between humanity and God – see Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed., pp. 315–16. Apart from the problems noted above with the appeal to epistemic distance, Hick's proposal also contravenes the third adequacy condition listed in Section 2 of my meta-theodicy (Chapter 9). To overcome this difficulty, one may allow (as Hick does not) that animal pain can be compensated for in an afterlife – such a theodicy for animal suffering is defended by Robert Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991): 120–40.

The gist of Swinburne's solution to the problem of animal suffering is that it is only by means of induction from past experience that higher animals (or vertebrates) can acquire knowledge of, for example, how to save their lives and those of their offspring from a forest fire (*The Existence of God*, rev. ed., p. 208, and *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 189–90). It is not clear, however, why this knowledge (or survival mechanism) could not be purely innate or instinctual, as is much animal behaviour. A further difficulty emanates from Swinburne's view that an animal cannot merely depend on its own past experiences in order to acquire the necessary knowledge, but must also rely on the observations it has made of other animals' experiences – he writes, for example, that "If deer are to learn how to help prevent their offspring from being caught in fires, some fawns have to be caught in fires for the deer to see what happens" (*Providence and the Problem of Evil*, p. 190). But as pointed out in the preceding paragraph, unless the suffering fawn is at least compensated for its pain (perhaps in an afterlife), it seems grossly unjust that it suffer merely for the benefit of others (hence the third constraint listed in Section 2 of my meta-theodicy). For some telling criticisms of Swinburne's theodicy for animal suffering, see Philip Quinn's "Review of Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 394–98, and Paul Draper's "Review of Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*," *Noûs* 35 (2001): 469–72. Unfortunately, these critics neglect an additional explanation of animal suffering proffered by Swinburne on pp. 171–73 of *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, where it is argued that the life of animals "is richer for the complexity and difficulty of the tasks they face and the

hardships to which they react appropriately" (p. 173). This is an interesting line of thought, but one that I cannot delve into here.

[31]   Reichenbach develops his theodicy in "Natural Evils and Natural Laws: A Theodicy for Natural Evils," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1976):179–96, and in *Evil and a Good God*, pp. 101–18.

[32]   Cf. F.R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), pp. 199–200, where emphasis is laid upon the necessity of a physical order characterized by law or regularity in order for the world to be "a theatre of moral life."

[33]   A similar case against frequent divine intervention in the natural order is offered by David Basinger, "Evil As Evidence Against God's Existence: Some Clarifications," *Modern Schoolman* 58 (1981): 180–81. It can also be argued that continuous divine intervention is incompatible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good God, for such a God would foresee any pointless natural evil and arrange for it to be removed or avoided prior to creation (see Reichenbach, "Natural Evils and Natural Laws," pp. 183–84, and Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, p. 112). Foreknowledge of this kind, however, may not be possible if natural processes are indeterminate.

[34]   In particular Michael Martin, "Reichenbach on Natural Evil," *Religious Studies* 24 (1988): 91–99, where it is argued that a world of frequent miracles need not rule out rational choice.

[35]   H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," p. 104.

[36]   Madden and Hare, *Evil and the Concept of God*, pp. 54–55.

[37]   Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, p. 111.

[38]   *Ibid*.

[39]   *Ibid*.

[40]   *Ibid*., p. 112.

[41]   See Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, p. 116. According to van Inwagen, 'designing' an alternative world, and thus meeting condition (a), requires the following steps to be undertaken:

  (i)   describe in some detail the laws of nature that govern the alternative world W;
 (ii)   describe the boundary conditions under which those laws operate;
(iii)   provide a detailed account of cosmic evolution in W (e.g., the evolution of large objects such as galaxies and small objects such as carbon atoms), and
 (iv)   provide an account of the evolution of life in W.

See van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," p. 146.

[42]   Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, p. 115.

[43]   Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 115–16.

[44]   Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God*, p. 116.

[45]   Similar sceptical sentiments are expressed by David Basinger, "Evil As Evidence Against God's Existence," p. 181; William Hasker, "Suffering, Soul-Making, and Salvation," pp. 16–17; William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," pp. 54–57; Peter van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," pp. 140–52; Charles T. Hughes, "Theism, Natural Evil, and Superior Possible Worlds," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 31 (1992): 45–61; and Daniel Howard-Snyder, "God, Evil, and Suffering," p. 96.

[46]   Van Inwagen, "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," p. 146.

[47]   Hasker, 'Suffering, Soul-Making, and Salvation', p. 17.

[48]   G. Stanley Kane, 'The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6 (1975): 6–7.

49   In some cases, however, natural evil may be prevented only by direct divine intervention (though not necessarily by way of some extraordinary divine act that is instantly recognized as a miracle).

50   For another attempt at designing a better natural system, see Part XI of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, where Hume suggests ways of correcting four defects in the world that are collectively responsible for most instances of natural evil.

51   Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," pp. 276–77, emphases his.

52   One specific variety of horrendous natural evil that may be amenable to theodical explanation is 'epistemic evil'. This is evil that consists of suffering brought about by erroneous human judgments – these errors, however, are non-culpable since they arise from limitations in the epistemic circumstances of the judge that are beyond the judge's conscious control. To give an example, suppose that some parents have sent their child to a school that they, after diligently researching the matter, consider to be one of the best in their city. To their horror, however, they eventually discover that the school principal is a paedophile who has sexually abused their child a number of times. The parents' error in judgment is ultimately responsible for the suffering that results (both to the parents and the child), although the parents are not morally blameworthy for their erroneous judgment. Such cases of 'epistemic evil' may therefore be thought of as natural evils – indeed, they can be classified as horrendous natural evils insofar as they are causally responsible for horrendous moral evils such as child sexual abuse. But as the above example indicates, if non-culpable human ignorance were entirely removed from the world, our ability to exercise our free will in various harmful ways would be significantly curtailed. Thus, a free will theodicy for at least one form of HNE (viz., epistemic evil) may be available. For a good discussion of the problem of epistemic evil, see Joel Thomas Tierno, *Descartes on God and Human Error* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1997).

The name 'chance happenings' is inconsistent with real religion. For nothing can happen by accident of fortune, if all things are regulated by Providence.

<div align="right">(Ulrich Zwingli, "On the Providence of God," p. 213)</div>

If God is conceived as a fastidious cosmic potentate who arranges the goods and evils of this world into neat and simple patterns, and coordinates events so that every evil, no matter how great, has some definite purpose, then certainly such a deity does not exist. It is no surprise that the modern age, preoccupied with the meaningless and absurd features of the human enterprise, is quick to pronounce that simplistic God "silent", "absent", and even "dead".

<div align="right">(Michael Peterson, "Evil as Evidence for the Existence of God," p. 126)</div>

MASHA. But what's the point of it all?
TUZENBAKH. The point? Look, it's snowing out there. What's the point of that?

<div align="right">(Anton Chekhov, "Three Sisters," trans. Ronald Hingley, p. 198)</div>

12. THE COMPATIBILITY OF GRATUITOUS EVIL WITH THEISM

It is often assumed by all sides of the debate on the problem of evil that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God could not permit any gratuitous evil, evil that is (roughly speaking) avoidable, pointless, or unnecessary with respect to the fulfillment of God's purposes. This widespread assumption is incorporated in the theological premise of Rowe's argument, the premise that states that God must have a morally sufficient reason for every evil he permits. Rowe takes this to be the least controversial aspect of his argument. And the consensus seems to be that Rowe is right – the theological premise, or a version thereof that is immune from some minor infelicities in the original formulation, is usually thought of as indisputable, self-evident, necessarily true, or something of that ilk.[1] The intuition here, as the Howard-Snyders explain, is that "on the face of it, the idea that God may well permit gratuitous evil is absurd. After all, if God can get what He wants without permitting some particular horror (or anything comparably bad), why on earth would He permit it?"[2] The focus, then, tends to be placed on Rowe's factual premise. Madden and Hare, for example, state that "the really interesting problem of evil is whether the apparent gratuity [of much evil] can be explained away by more ingenious measures or whether the gratuity is real and hence detrimental to religious belief."[3] That pointless evil is not compatible with theism is simply taken for granted.

An increasing number of theists, however, are beginning to question Rowe's theological premise. This way of responding to the evidential problem of evil has been described by Rowe as "radical, if not revolutionary"[4], but it is viewed by many theists as the only way to remain faithful to the common human experience of evil, according to which utterly gratuitous evil not only exists but is abundant. In the present chapter I will consider three attempts that have been made to square gratuitous evil with theistic belief. I will begin with

Peter van Inwagen's suggestion that much of the evil in the world may be due to chance and hence purposeless. Next, I will consider a different line of argument advanced by van Inwagen against the theological premise, one that purports to bring to light some of this premise's unwelcome consequences. Finally, Michael Peterson's case against the doctrine of meticulous providence, a doctrine said to be entailed by the theological premise, will be examined.

1   VAN INWAGEN'S GOD OF CHANCE

In his 1988 paper, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," van Inwagen sketches a theistic worldview in which chance, and by extension gratuitous evil, plays a prominent role.[5] But what does van Inwagen mean by 'chance'? Writers on this topic usually distinguish two ways of conceiving of chance: firstly, one may think that a chance event is one whose cause is unknown ('subjective chance'); alternatively, one may hold that chance events are those that have no cause at all, or at least no determining cause ('objective chance'). On this latter view, chance is not a reflection of human ignorance, but is rather a fundamental aspect of the world which no amount of further knowledge can eradicate. Van Inwagen, however, proposes a quite different account of chance. To say that an event is a 'chance' occurrence, writes van Inwagen, is to say that it is "without purpose or significance; it is not a part of anyone's plan; it serves no one's end; and it might very well not have been."[6] He goes on to explain that "a chance event … is one such that, if someone asks of it, 'Why did that happen?' the only right answer is: 'There *is* no reason or explanation; it just happened'."[7] If, for example, Alice is crossing a street only to be struck and killed by a car whose brakes have failed, there would be no way of answering her grieving husband's question, 'Why did she die?' In one sense, however, there is a clear explanation for Alice's death – she was struck by a car. Thus, Alice's death could not be classified as a chance happening if we are using the word 'chance' to mean 'event whose cause is unknown' (and, according to some, this would hold even if are using the word to mean 'event having no determining cause'). But, as van Inwagen points out, to say that Alice died because she was struck by a car travelling at 100 km per hour is hardly the kind of explanation her grieving husband is looking for when he cries out in despair, 'Why did she die?' Presumably, what he wants to know is what *purpose* was served by her death (in Aristotelian terminology, he is searching for the final cause, not the efficient cause). By calling an event a 'chance' event, van Inwagen means to say that it has no explanation of the kind Alice's husband is requesting, for it was brought about accidentally or unintentionally and so it has no purpose or significance – it is not a part of anyone's plan.[8]

Van Inwagen then goes on to advance the following thesis: "Much of what goes on in the world, even much of what seems important and significant to us, is no part of God's plan – and certainly not a part of anyone *else's* plan – and is therefore due simply to chance."[9] He attempts to substantiate this claim by identifying three sources of chance in a world sustained by God, that is to say, three principal ways in which chance may enter such a world: (a) the free will of rational creatures, (b) natural indeterminism (e.g., quantum events), and (c) the initial state of the created world.[10]

Given the foregoing account of 'chance', and given that it is plausible to suppose that there are a great many states of affairs in the world that are due to chance (i.e., are not part of God's plan), it follows that it is very likely that among these states of affairs that are due solely to chance are certain evils – "or perhaps even *all* evils," speculates van Inwagen.[11] But as noted earlier, if an event is the result of chance it will not admit of any explanation (at least of the kind Alice's husband was requesting). Van Inwagen illustrates this point by considering a broadly defined evil as well as a particular instance of evil.

The general evil he considers is the rabies viral infection. In van Inwagen's view, the emergence and spread of this virus is purely a chance occurrence. As he puts it, "if the initial arrangement of things had been slightly different, or if the indeterministic course of the natural world had taken a slightly different turning in the remote past (on any of uncounted billions of occasions), the particular disease we call rabies would never have come into existence."[12] In that case, however, it is not possible to provide an explanation for God's permission of the rabies disease. Van Inwagen allows that there may be a good explanation of the fact that there is evil, but he adds that it is not reasonable (of the theist) to want or expect an explanation of the fact that one of the evils is the particular disease rabies.

Van Inwagen then turns to a more specific evil, the case of Alice who was accidentally killed by a car whose brakes had failed – this he calls an example of 'death by misadventure'. Suppose that an explanation for God's permission of deaths by misadventure is available and known to us. Even if this were the case, van Inwagen asks, "why should the theist want or expect an explanation of the fact that *Alice*, then and there, died by misadventure? … If it really is true that God has a general reason for permitting deaths by misadventure, need He have a particular reason for permitting *this* death by misadventure? Why?"[13] Considerations such as these lead van Inwagen to end his paper with the following "moral for students of the problem of evil":

Do not attempt any solution to this problem that entails that every particular evil has a purpose, or that, with respect to every individual

misfortune, or every devastating earthquake, or every disease, God has
some special reason for allowing it. Concentrate rather on the problem
of what sort of reasons a loving and providential God might have for
allowing His creatures to live in a world in which many of the evils that
happen to them happen to them for no reason at all.[14]

Although van Inwagen does not draw out the implications of his views
for evidential atheological arguments like Rowe's, the implications are not
difficult to discern. For if van Inwagen's chance worldview were accepted,
then the commonly made assumption by theists and non-theists alike that,
*For any particular evil E permitted by God, there is a morally sufficient rea-
son for God's permission of E*, would have to be surrendered.[15] This assump-
tion in Rowe's argument is encapsulated by his 'theological premise', which
states that:

> An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any
> intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby los-
> ing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

More simply put, the theistic God would not permit an evil unless he had a
good reason to permit it. But this clearly clashes with van Inwagen's posi-
tion that theism is entirely consistent with the view that God has created a
world in which many instances of evil are the product of mere chance and
so God has no reason for allowing them to occur. Does van Inwagen suc-
ceed in refuting Rowe's theological premise?

To recapitulate, van Inwagen's argument is that the physical world abounds
with chancy events. The likelihood, therefore, that many or most evil events are
the product of chance is quite high. In that case, however, much evil is gratu-
itous in that no explanation for God's permission of it is available. But does a
chancy world of this sort count against God's goodness or providence? Van
Inwagen suggests that divine providence is not impugned *as long as* God has
a (morally adequate) general policy for allowing those particular evils that are
the product of chance. For example, a general policy of not interfering with the
free choices of rational creatures would explain why God permits moral evil,
even though it would not explain why God permits this, that or the other token
of moral evil.[16]

Perhaps one way of challenging van Inwagen's argument is to cast doubt
on his key premise that chance is a fundamental constituent of the world.
One may, for example, resort to some variety of theological determinism,
according to which every event has a determining cause, viz., God.

According to some, this only renders the problem of evil even more intractable for the theist, since God seems to become the author of evil in virtue of willing it and not merely permitting it. Although I do not find this objection convincing, I would like to engage with van Inwagen on his own libertarian turf. Within such a framework, one might challenge van Inwagen's claim that it is morally permissible for God to permit a particular evil E for no reason at all as long as E forms part of a (morally adequate) general divine policy for allowing evils of the sort to which E belongs. Eleonore Stump, for example, has argued that this claim is inconsistent with the traditional theistic picture of God as someone who desires above all else to enter into loving relationships with his human creatures.[17] God, says Stump, wants human beings to develop certain attitudes towards him – for example, trust, gratitude – which are required in any relationship of love between persons. But a person A cannot have such attitudes towards another person B if A believes that B will (sometimes or often) allow A (and every other member of A's species) to suffer for no other reason than enhancing a general, communal good. Consider, for example, the following illustration offered by Stump:

> In her moving history of three generations of women in China, Jung Chang chronicles the way in which her mother's love for her father crumbled and her trust in him dissolved as she came to realize that he was willing, at least sometimes, to let her suffer anything, however much he could have prevented it, in pursuit of a communal good for the whole state.[18]

Stump here alludes to SCR, the sufferer-centred requirement included in my meta-theodicy (refer to the third adequacy condition in Section 2 of Chapter 9), which states that at least one of the goods secured by instances of horrendous evil must benefit the sufferer. But van Inwagen need not violate SCR. For it is open to van Inwagen to state that God has no reason for permitting particular instances of evil such as Alice's death, that is to say, no reason beyond his general policy of not interfering with the course of nature, but when such evils do take place the sufferer is duly compensated (by, for example, being granted heavenly bliss). Of course, from the fact that God orders a particular evil E toward some further specific good G, it by no means follows that G provides a specific reason for God's permitting E in the first place. Aiming for G may well be God's 'response' to E; it does not follow that attaining G is God's specific reason for allowing E.

One may be left, however, with a residual feeling of dissatisfaction with this proposed 'way out' for van Inwagen. Would you really trust a deity that

leaves the world at the mercy of Tyche or Fortuna? As Stump asks, "Could one trust such a God with one's child, one's life? Could one say, as the Psalmist does, 'I will both lay me down in peace and sleep, for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety'?"[19] The answer may in large part depend on the degree to which the world is said to be infested with chance.

Consider, for example, the kind of world van Inwagen alleges to be consonant with theism, viz., one in which chance is introduced by means of the free will of rational creatures, the operations of nature, and the initial arrangement of matter. It seems that nearly every, if not absolutely every, state of affairs in our world (the actual world) is brought about by at least one of the aforementioned three factors (viz., free will, natural processes, and the initial state of the world). But then every, or nearly every, state of affairs in our world would be nothing but a chance occurrence and hence not a part of God's plan. This clearly introduces an unacceptably high level of risk into God's creation, and moreover raises the suspicion that van Inwagen's position reflects an excessively deistic conception of God's causal relation to the world.[20] In the popular sense of the term, deism is the view that "a supreme being created the world but then, like an absentee landlord, left it to run on its own."[21] Deists, therefore, are often accused of postulating a remote and indifferent God, one who does not exercise providential care over his creation. Such a deity, however, resembles van Inwagen's God of chance. For van Inwagen restricts God's causal contribution to the creation of the physical world, the sustenance of all things in existence, and the conservation of their causal powers.[22] Thus, van Inwagen, like the deists before him, is committed to the view that God is not an immediate or direct cause of any effect brought about in the created world. The result is a dark and risky universe subject to the forces of blind chance. But it is difficult to imagine a *personal* God – that is, a God who seeks to be personally related to us and hence wants us to develop attitudes of love and trust towards him – providing humans with such a habitat. To paraphrase Einstein, God does not play dice with our lives.[23]

This, however, need not mean that God does not play dice at all. It is not impossible, in other words, to accommodate chance within a theistic worldview. Suppose, for instance, that chance occurrences in the world are limited to 'insignificant' events or states of affairs such as 'Mary opened the door just when James scratched his ear' and 'The leaf of that tree fell to the ground at 10.23 AM'. Assuming that events such as these are as trivial as they initially seem (that is to say, they have no hidden importance), it would be no offence to theism if it turned out that these events are entirely the product of chance.[24] By contrast, a (Christian) theist would find it difficult to attribute to mere chance the occurrence of comparatively meaningful

events such as the crucifixion of Jesus and the conversion of emperor Constantine to Christianity. Thus, chance need not be barred from a theistic worldview, though it must be confined to the level of the mundane.[25] This, of course, raises the issue of which events are to be counted as 'significant'. If the significance of an event is roughly proportional to the effect it has on the welfare or well-being of some sentient creature (or some community of such creatures), then many, if not most, evils suffered by humans and animals would be classed as events of some significance. Consequently, such evils cannot be treated by the theist as mere chance occurrences.

There is, however, a sense in which van Inwagen is correct to treat particular evils as chancy events. Van Inwagen, it may be recalled, maintains that there could be a general explanation of God's allowing, say, deaths by misadventure even though there is no explanation of God's permission of a particular instance of death by misadventure (e.g., the death of Alice) that goes above and beyond God's general reasons for permitting evils of that kind. It may also be recalled that it was considerations such as these that led us, in Section 1 of Chapter 9, to renounce the project of providing a Theodicy$_4$ – that is, the project of explaining why God permits particular instances of evil. But to say that no explanation for the occurrence of particular evils like $E1$ is available is just to say that such events are not part of God's plan – they are therefore simply due to chance. The theist, however, cannot go on to class all evils as the product of chance. Even if particular instances of evil, such as $E1$, are inexplicable and in this sense due to chance, the evil-kinds within which such evils can be subsumed (e.g., the class of natural evils) must be taken to serve some higher divine purpose. Although I am, thus far, in complete agreement with van Inwagen, it is important to note that the sort of commitment to gratuitous evil envisioned here is entirely innocuous for proponents of Rowe's theological premise. For one can simply modify this premise so that it ranges *either* over particular instances of evil *or* (to accommodate cases where particular evils admit of no explanation) over broadly defined evils or evil-kinds under which the relevant particular evils can be subsumed. And so a world created by God may be replete with chance, as van Inwagen imagines, but that need not present a problem for Rowe.

2   VAN INWAGEN'S NO MINIMUM THESIS

In a recent paper entitled "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," van Inwagen ventures a different line of attack against the theological premise. He begins by outlining an argument similar to Rowe's evidential

argument but based on an instance of evil dubbed 'the Mutilation'.[26] Van
Inwagen's account of the Mutilation runs as follows:

> A man came upon a young woman in an isolated place. He overpowered
> her, chopped off her arms at the elbows with an axe, raped her, and left
> her to die. Somehow she managed to drag herself on the stumps of her
> arms to the side of a road, where she was discovered. She lived, but she
> experienced indescribable suffering, and although she is alive, she must
> live the rest of her life without arms and with the memory of what had
> been done to her.[27]

Van Inwagen then devises the following Rowe-like argument:

(1) If the Mutilation had not occurred, if it had been, so to speak, sim-
ply left out of the world, the world would be no worse than it is.
(2) The Mutilation occurred and was a horror.
(3) If a morally perfect creator could have left a certain horror out of the
world he created, and if the world he created would have been no
worse if that horror had been left out of it than it would have been if
it had included that horror, then the morally perfect creator would
have left the horror out of the world he created – or at any rate he
would have left it out if he had been able to.
(4) If an omnipotent being created the world, he was able to leave the
Mutilation out of the world (and was able to do so in a way that would
have left the world otherwise much as it is).
(5) Therefore, there is no omnipotent and morally perfect creator.[28]

Unlike most theists who have responded to such arguments, van
Inwagen does not find fault with the first premise, but rather considers it
to be "fairly plausible."[29] Instead, he attempts to debunk premise (3), which
corresponds to Rowe's theological premise. This premise, states van
Inwagen, appears to be predicated on a general moral principle of the fol-
lowing sort:

> (MP) If one is in a position to prevent some evil, one should not allow
> that evil to occur – not unless allowing it to occur would result in
> some good that would outweigh it or preventing it would result in
> some other evil at least as bad.[30]

But is (MP) true? Van Inwagen thinks not, and to substantiate his position
he draws attention to some scenarios of what would (or could) result if (MP)

were put into practice by some moral agent. Each scenario functions in effect as a *reductio ad absurdum* of (MP). The first of these scenarios is described as follows:

> Suppose you are an official who has the power to release anyone from prison at any time. Blodgett has been sentenced to ten years in prison for felonious assault. His sentence is nearing its end, and he petitions you to release him from prison a day early. Should you? Well, the principle [i.e., (MP)] says so. A day spent in prison is an evil – if you don't think so, I invite you to spend a day in prison … Let's suppose that the only good that could result from someone's being in prison is the deterrence of crime … Obviously, nine years, three hundred and sixty-four days spent in prison is not going to have a significantly different power to deter felonious assault from ten years spent in prison. So: no good will be secured by visiting on Blodgett that last day in prison and that last day spent in prison is an evil. The principle therefore tells you, the official, to let him out a day early.[31]

Van Inwagen concludes that "this much, I think, is enough to show that the principle is wrong, for you have no such obligation."[32] But there is worse in store for (MP). By means of the reasoning employed in the above case, van Inwagen reveals that (MP) has further disastrous results. To paraphrase van Inwagen:

> First, consider the fact that a threatened punishment of n days in prison for felonious assault would not have a significantly less deterrent effect on felonious assault as a threatened punishment of $n - 1$ days in prison. For example, a threatened punishment of, say, 1023 days in prison would not have a significantly less deterrent effect as a threatened punishment of 1022 days. But then, by applying reasoning familiar to students of *sorites* arguments, we quickly arrive at the conclusion that a threatened punishment of 1023 days would not have a significantly less deterrent effect as a threatened punishment of no time at all in prison.
>
> Now, let's suppose that Blodgett, after being sentenced to ten years in prison, is given the opportunity to appeal for a reduction in his sentence. Clever Blodgett takes up this opportunity and appeals for a reduction in his sentence of only one day. Given that you (the prison official) accept (MP), you must grant his appeal. Blodgett then lodges a second appeal: that his sentence be reduced from ten years minus one day to ten years minus two days. Again, you are obliged to grant his appeal. As long as Blodgett has the time and energy to lodge 3,648 successive appeals (each

one for a one-day reduction of his sentence) before entering prison, he will escape prison altogether![33]

The above cases, in van Inwagen's view, indicate that the problem with (MP) is that it "forbids the drawing of morally arbitrary lines."[34] (MP) does not countenance such things as a legislature's right to set an arbitrary time span (e.g., 10 years) as the minimum punishment for felonious assault. Although there is nothing intrinsically wrong with setting such arbitrary limits – indeed, this is a necessity in many facets of the real world – (MP) cannot make any provision for this practice and for this reason it has highly counterintuitive consequences.

The implausibility of (MP) is further highlighted by considering it in the light of God's decision as to which evils to prevent and which to permit. Let's assume that God's plan for humanity includes the permission of a vast amount of horrendous evil for the sake of some future good that outweighs it – this future good may be called the 'Summum Bonum Creatum', though its nature or content need not detain us here. Consider, now, the case of the Mutilation. Should God have added this particular horror to his list of horrors to be prevented?

Suppose that God is guided in his deliberations about what to do by the principle expressed in (MP). In that case, God would prevent the Mutilation from taking place. For if the Mutilation were prevented, the world would not have been a significantly less horrible place, and so God's plan for the realization of the Summum Bonum Creatum would not have been jeopardized.[35] But this point can be generalized as follows: For any n, if the existence of n horrors is consistent with God's plan for the achievement of the Summum Bonum Creatum, the existence of $n - 1$ horrors will be equally consistent with his plan.[36] Clearly, if this reasoning were applied to every instance of evil, God will end up creating a world totally devoid of evil. But even though God may prevent many horrors, he cannot (we have assumed) prevent *all* of them without thwarting his plan for achieving the Summum Bonum Creatum. (MP), therefore, would result in the frustration of God's purposes.

To avoid this outcome, God must draw the line somewhere between horrors that are to be prevented and horrors that are to be permitted. But wherever he draws the line, it will be an arbitrary line. For assume that he draws the line so as to exclude the Mutilation from the set of actual horrors. In that case, no greater good would have been lost and no evil equally bad or worse would have resulted – thus, God would have no reason for drawing the line in such a way as to exclude the Mutilation. The line would have to be drawn arbitrarily. And it just so happens (we are assuming) that the Mutilation has fallen on the 'actual horrors of history' side of the line.

In short, if (MP) is rejected, the number of evils God must permit in order to fulfill his purposes becomes a purely arbitrary matter. What this means is that *there is no minimum number of horrors* that God must permit in order to realize the Summum Bonum Creatum. Let's call this van Inwagen's *No Minimum Thesis*:

> There is no minimum amount of horrendous evil that God must permit in order for the greater good(s) he aims at to be secured.

As van Inwagen puts it, "to ask what the minimum number of horrors consistent with [God's] plan is, is like asking, What is the minimum number of raindrops that could have fallen on England in the nineteenth century that is consistent with England's having been a fertile country in the nineteenth century?"[37] But if there is no minimum number of horrors, it is logically impossible for God to produce it and hence unreasonable for anyone to expect that he do so.[38]

To summarize, premise (3) – which mirrors Rowe's theological premise – is predicated on (MP), but (MP) has unwelcome consequences, as has been brought out by the examples involving prison sentencing and, especially, God's permission of horrendous evil. (MP), therefore, ought to be rejected and replaced by the No Minimum Thesis, which better reflects the realities and vagaries of our moral life. The No Minimum Thesis, however, entails the falsity of (MP) and, by extension, of premise (3). Therefore, Rowe's argument, as it employs something analogous to premise (3), is unsound. It seems, then, that proponents of Rowe-like arguments must find some reasonable grounds for rejecting the No Minimum Thesis. Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder sum up the matter as follows:

> Until we articulate principled grounds for denying the No Minimum Claim, we cannot responsibly say that theism is incompatible with gratuitous evil; until we articulate principled grounds for denying this, we cannot responsibly accept Rowe's incompatibility claim [that the truth of theism is not compatible with the existence of gratuitous evil], or the argument that goes with it. To date, no one has met this challenge; indeed, no one has even tried.[39]

In the following Section, however, I aim to show that the position advanced here by the Howard-Snyders is mistaken, for there need not be any incompatibility between the No Minimum Thesis and what the Howard-Snyders call 'Rowe's incompatibility claim'.

3   TAKING THE STING OUT OF THE NO MINIMUM THESIS

One way of understanding van Inwagen's critique is as follows. If the principle expressed by (MP) were to be applied in a given situation, one would end up with a sorites-style chain of reasoning and hence an unpalatable conclusion (e.g., no criminal ought to spend even one day in prison). The problem is that sorites-style reasoning is flawed, even though it is infamously difficult to identify where precisely the flaw resides. As a result (MP) is also flawed, since any application of (MP) commits one to defective sorites-style arguments. The question, therefore, is whether there is any way of restating the evidential argument from evil that does not commit one to (MP) and thus does not oblige one to renounce the No Minimum Thesis.

To begin with, assume that van Inwagen's No Minimum Thesis is correct, and so there is no minimum amount of horrific evil God had to permit in order to achieve his purposes. As some commentators have pointed out, it is entirely consistent with this view that God could have achieved those purposes with *a lot less* horrific evil than there is.[40] And if this is the case, then God *should have* set out to achieve his purposes by way of a lot less horrific evil. The point here is that *even if there is no minimum amount of evil God had to permit, this does not entail that he would have permitted just any amount of evil*. If, for example, we were to assume that there is no minimum prison sentence that would suffice as a sufficient deterrent for car theft, this would not justify a judge sentencing a convicted car thief to life in prison.

The claim, then, is that even though there may be no minimum number of evils permissible by God, there must at least be a *threshold* beyond which any further instantiations of evil are gratuitous. To illustrate this, consider first the following diagram:
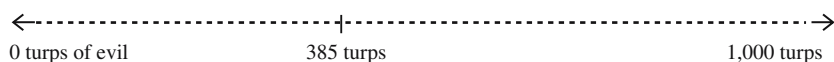
Figure 1.   Precisely specified amount of evil God must permit in order to achieve his ends

In the above diagram, evil is quantified in terms of 'turps' (to borrow Plantinga's terminology). Worlds in which God permits anything less than, or anything more than, 385 turps of evil will not allow for the achievement of his purposes. Therefore, only worlds in which God permits 385 turps of evil are ones in which his purposes can be fulfilled. In this case, 385 turps is

the minimum number of evils (as well as the maximum number of evils) God may permit.[41] Now, compare this scenario with the following:

Figure 2.   'Fuzzy' threshold for amount of evil God would have to permit in order for his purposes to be realized

In this diagram, in contrast to the previous one, there is no exact amount of evil God must permit in order to fulfill his ends. There is only a threshold, and any amount of evil falling within this threshold would be consistent with God's plan. But since the boundaries of the threshold are 'fuzzy', there is no precisely specified minimum amount of evil that God must permit in order to achieve his purposes. This threshold, however, does not rule out the possibility that there are amounts of evil that are clearly excessive. For example, worlds where God permits 1,000 turps of evil would clearly thwart the realization of his plan. And so, even if there is no minimum number of evils that God must allow, this does not leave God free to allow just any amount of evil into the world.[42]

In response, it may be held that it is impossible to determine whether our world is one in which the threshold, as represented in Figure 2, has been crossed. Of course, the amount of evil found in our world certainly *appears* excessive, but how can we tell whether appearances are in this case deceptive? For all we know, the amount of evil in our world falls somewhere within the threshold of 'acceptable amounts of evil'. Van Inwagen, therefore, can accept the claim that, even though there is no exact or ideal amount of evil that God must permit, not just any amount of evil would be permitted by God. But van Inwagen may question the further claim that our world contains excess evil, for it seems impossible to settle the truth-value of this claim. (He need not, of course, doubt our ability to tell, with respect to at least some possible worlds, whether they contain too much evil.)

Is this scepticism regarding our ability to determine whether there is excess evil in our world warranted? Consider Theodore Drange's comment that, "I can know that I have too much or too little of something even if I do not know exactly what the perfect amount would be. For example, I can know that my food is too salty even if I do not know exactly how much salt would be ideal."[43] Or, to borrow another of Drange's examples, I can tell whether my neighbour's music is too loud, even though I do not (or cannot) know what the ideal volume would be. "In a similar way," Drange contends, "we can know that our present world contains too much suffering even if we cannot describe in detail just what the ideal amount of suffering should be."[44]

But is Drange correct to draw this inference? If he only means to say that we can tell, with respect to at least some possible worlds, whether they contain too much evil, then it is difficult to dispute Drange's contention. But Drange wants to say more than this, for he is claiming that we can just see that *our* world contains too much suffering. But how could anyone know this?

I think the most promising option here is to rely on a strategy explored in Chapters 5–7, viz., the appeal to 'noseeum inferences'. That is to say, one can claim to know that our world contains excess – and hence gratuitous – evil on the basis of the failure of theodicy: despite thorough investigations on the part of many people over many years, no plausible justification for God's permission of numerous evils has been uncovered. Since no goods we know of can justify God's permission of these evils, we are entitled to infer that no goods whatever are served by the evils in question. The success of such a strategy will obviously depend on the degree of warrant that attaches to noseeum inferences. But if (as was argued in Chapters 5–7) little can be said against, and indeed something can be adduced in support of, Rowe's noseeum inference from inscrutable to pointless evil, then there is a way to overcome scepticism regarding our ability to tell whether our world contains too much evil.[45]

The upshot is that Rowe's theological premise withstands the objections levelled against it by van Inwagen via his No Minimum Thesis. But how is (MP) to be modified in order that it be immune from sorites-style paradoxes like those involving the sentencing of Blodgett? I propose the following reconstruction of (MP):

> (MP*) If God is in a position to prevent some amount of evil, he would not allow that amount of evil to be instantiated – unless that amount of evil falls within the threshold of evil he would have to permit to realize his ends.[46]

The threshold, however, is not precisely defined. Therefore, in some cases there may be no truth of the matter as to whether a particular amount of evil falls within the relevant threshold. Or, to venture into fuzzy logic, that a given amount of evil falls within the threshold may only be 'partly true'. Such departures from classical logic are highly controversial, and there is no need to insist here that one must adopt a non-standard logic to dissolve sorites-style paradoxes. For even though the boundaries of the threshold are fuzzy, the important point is that God would only permit that amount of evil that *clearly* falls within the threshold (or that clearly falls within *the bottom range* of the threshold). This, of course, is not to deny that God's choice of a specific quantity of evil, from amongst the various quantities of evil that fall

squarely within the threshold, is entirely arbitrary. And so with this in mind, Rowe's evidential argument can be recast as follows:

(P) No good we know of justifies God in permitting so much horrendous evil rather than a lot less.

(Q) (Therefore) No good at all justifies God in permitting so much horrendous evil rather than a lot less.

(TP) If God exists, then some good justifies him in permitting so much horrendous evil rather than a lot less.

(Concl.) (Therefore) It is likely that there is no God.[47]

The move from (P) to (Q) represents Rowe's 'noseeum inference', while (TP) is an amended version of Rowe's theological premise. As long as (TP) is predicated on something like (MP*), the counterintuitive scenarios that plague (MP) will be avoided, since (MP*) allows for both the vagaries of moral life (e.g., there being no precise prison sentence sufficient to deter car theft) and for arbitrarily made decisions in response to these vagaries (e.g., setting twelve months exactly as the minimum prison sentence for car theft). But given that (MP*) does not entail the falsity of the No Minimum Thesis, there is no need – despite the suggestion made by the Howard-Snyders as quoted at the end of Section 2 above – to find some principled grounds for denying this Thesis before accepting the theological premise of Rowe's argument. In short, a commitment to the No Minimum Thesis does not exclude a commitment to the position that gratuitous evil is not compatible with the theistic worldview.[48]

4   PETERSON'S REJECTION OF METICULOUS PROVIDENCE

For nearly as long as Rowe has been defending the evidential argument from evil, Michael Peterson has been attempting to show that the weakness with this argument does not lie with its factual premise, as many have assumed, but with its theological premise – the premise that, *If there are gratuitous evils then there is no God*.[49] As Peterson points out, those who uphold this conditional statement are thereby committed to the doctrine of meticulous providence, which states that:

An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God would prevent or eliminate the existence of (genuinely, and not merely apparently) gratuitous evils.[50]

Thus, to accept Rowe's theological premise is to buy into a particular conception of God, one which has God exercising a meticulous providence – a

providence in which, as Hasker explains, "all events are carefully controlled and manipulated in such a way that no evils are permitted to occur except as they are necessary for the production of a greater good."[51] Peterson's goal is to demonstrate the implausibility of this conception of divine providence, thus reconciling the existence of God with the existence of pointless evil and challenging the seemingly uncontroversial character of Rowe's theological premise. Peterson, of course, is by no means unique in rejecting this premise, as is indicated by the earlier discussion of van Inwagen's critique. However, the case developed by Peterson against the theological premise not only incorporates a very different strategy to that found in van Inwagen but has also influenced other prominent theists to construct objections of a similar nature against Rowe's argument.[52] It will be worthwhile, therefore, to examine closely Peterson's objections to meticulous providence.

4.1   Peterson on the Defensive

Peterson's objections to meticulous providence and, by extension, to the theological premise fall into two categories, the first of which deals with reasons that are (or could be) offered in support of this premise, while the second class of objections consists of reasons to think that the premise is false or implausible.

Beginning with the first and more defensive set of criticisms, Peterson has two general claims to make. His first claim draws on the distinction (clarified in Section 5 of Chapter 5) between restricted standard theism (RST) and expanded standard theism (EST). According to Peterson, *the theological premise is not entailed by RST*, and yet Rowe has often claimed (in response to Wykstra's CORNEA critique) that he is relying solely on RST in order to formulate his version of the evidential problem of evil. Peterson's point, as he puts it, is that "the conceptual resources of restricted theism are not rich enough to generate ample detailed information about how omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness would act."[53] RST, it will be recalled, does not include any claim that is not entailed by it. RST, therefore, will only include such propositions as 'It is not the case that God is not omnipotent' and 'Omniscience is knowledge of all that is logically possible to know'. But herein lies an irony in Rowe's case: "He starts out saying that he is officially interested in discussing restricted theism. Yet he unwittingly includes in [the theological premise] an interpretation of how God would be disposed toward evil that is not really entailed by restricted theism."[54]

It is open to Rowe to reply that the theological premise is derived not merely from RST, but from RST in conjunction with some necessary truths (of logic and/or ethics) that any rational person would accept. Rowe, indeed, hints at such a view when stating that the theological premise "seems to

express a belief that accords with our basic moral principles, principles shared by theists and nontheists."[55] One of these basic moral principles may be that identified by van Inwagen – viz., (MP) – or its less problematic variant, (MP*). If the truth of such principles is thought to be a matter of necessity and not an empirical matter[56], and if the theological premise is entailed by some such principle, then this premise would itself be deemed a necessary truth.

Peterson, however, maintains that what Rowe assumes about the nature of divine goodness in his theological premise is simply not a necessary truth. In particular, Peterson takes Rowe to be assuming that divine goodness consists in the fact that God necessarily produces as many good states of affairs, and prevents as many evil states of affairs, as possible. But this account of divine goodness presupposes a consequentialist ethic and so reduces God to a kind of 'Cosmic Utility-Maximizer'.[57] The implication, of course, is that the underlying principles embodied by consequentialism (and hence by Rowe's conception of divine goodness) cannot plausibly be viewed as necessary truths, or at least as truths that would be accepted by any rational person who understands them.

In response, suppose that the theological premise does indeed assume a consequentialist understanding of morality. Now, if one thought that basic moral principles express necessary truths, then (even if one were a consequentialist) one would be inclined to hold that the moral principles which form the foundations of one's ethical theory are necessarily true (the following principle, for example, may be regarded by an act-consequentialist as a necessary truth: In a choice between two courses of action, an agent is required to choose the one which will produce the most good). Thus, the theological premise need not lose its status as a necessary truth even if it is committed to some variety of consequentialism.

But why even suppose that the truth of the theological premise depends on the truth of consequentialism? Rowe, of course, thinks that this premise should be acceptable to deontologists as well as consequentialists.[58] Critics have, I suspect, been misled by the wording in which Rowe's theological premise and principles like (MP) are sometimes couched. For example, in saying that God may permit an evil E only if E *leads to* some greater good G, or only if preventing E would *result in* some other evil E' at least as bad as E, the emphasis is placed on the *consequences* of permitting or preventing E. But then Rowe's theological premise, as Eric Reitan observes, "presupposes that the moral status of evil-eliminating acts is determined by the overall balance of good over evil that such an act produces. And this certainly *sounds* like a consequentialist perspective."[59] The theological premise, however, need not be read in this consequentialist way. Indeed, it seems more faithful to Rowe's intentions to read the theological premise as stating, roughly, that God is justified in permitting an evil E only if E is necessary for some greater

good *G*, where *G* is not restricted to goods that result from the occurrence of *E* but may also include some deontological moral requirement.[60]

Thus, Peterson's first line of criticism against the theological premise fails, as this premise can plausibly be viewed as following from RST in conjunction with some set of moral principles that express necessary truths. Peterson, however, has a second line of criticism, which is predicated on the fact that the various forms of EST often differ in their underlying theories of morality and value.[61] Versions of EST that differ in this respect will obviously produce different conceptions of moral goodness, including divine goodness, and different understandings of what sorts of goods outweigh evils. But then some versions of EST, depending on the system of ethics and value they embrace, may well hold that gratuitous evil does not constitute a blemish on God's character. In fact, Peterson maintains that the variety of EST that he favours – viz., orthodox Christian theism – is committed to a non-consequentialist view of morality that makes gratuitous evil not only possible but entirely unsurprising in a world created by God that is fit for human flourishing.

This second objection, insofar as it assumes that the theological premise is not a necessary truth, is clearly indebted to the earlier line of criticism which has already been exposed as inadequate. Putting this aside, it may be wondered how Peterson finds a place for gratuitous evil within any theistic worldview, be it Christian or not. This brings us to Peterson's offensive strategy.

4.2 Peterson on the Offensive

Peterson's offensive strategy consists in describing some important features exhibited by a world taken to be the creative work of the God of Christian theism, and then showing how a world that exhibits these features must allow for the existence of gratuitous evil.[62] Two features of the world come in for particular attention by Peterson, viz., the moral order and the natural order.

The *moral order* refers to God's creation of human beings with (libertarian) free will of a morally significant kind, thus giving them the opportunity to accomplish great and noble deeds as well as the most atrocious actions. But in bestowing this kind of freedom upon humanity, God must also allow humans to bring about evil which is utterly gratuitous. In other words, God cannot ensure that humans never perform moral evils that are gratuitous without at the same time severely diminishing the scope of their freedom. What this means is that gratuitous moral evil must be possible in a theistic world exhibiting moral order, or as Peterson states:

> The *possibility* of gratuitous moral evil is *necessary* to the most significant kind of human freedom. That is, a free moral order which contains

significant freedom requires that it be possible to bring about evils the prevention of which would not thereby prevent the occurrence of some greater good. If this were not possible, I propose that *morality would be undermined*.[63]

The moral order, however, is embedded in the *natural order*, the system of natural laws that regulate the behaviour of all objects in the physical world. As emphasized by natural law theodicies (see Chapter 11, Section 3), a world governed by natural laws provides the stability and predictability required for the exercise of deliberation and free choice. A natural order is therefore indispensable for the existence of a moral order. Thus, in providing an environment in which free will can operate, a natural order makes possible the existence of gratuitous moral evil. Peterson argues, however, that the natural order also sets the stage for the possibility of gratuitous natural evil. His argument begins with the contention, developed originally in the context of natural law theodicies, that the possibility of natural evil is inherent in any natural order. He then extends this view to the case of gratuitous natural evil:

> It is difficult to imagine that God would or could arrange all natural evils so that they realized some higher goods. To do so would almost certainly involve the interruption or alteration of the operation of natural objects and thus jeopardize the very meaning of a natural system. A natural system runs, as it were, of its own accord. But if natural evils are possible and God does not – indeed, cannot – coordinate their results to produce greater goods, then we have to recognize the possibility of gratuitous natural evils.[64]

In short, Peterson's view is that, on his version of Christian theism at least, *it is necessary that gratuitous evil be possible*. This, of course, does not mean that gratuitous evil is necessary, but rather that gratuitous evil must be possible in any world created by God that consists of a moral and natural order.[65]

In evaluating Peterson's attempted reconciliation of theism with gratuitous evil, the following remarkable fact quickly comes to the surface: virtually every critic of Peterson's case (that I am aware of) has objected that Peterson is guilty of employing an idiosyncratic conception of gratuitous evil.[66] And as I will proceed to argue, this does in fact represent the Achilles heel of Peterson's argument. It is unfortunate, therefore, that Peterson has not, in print at least, felt the need to discuss this objection. The importance of this objection, however, does not rest there, for it also helps to clarify the

relationship between the goods invoked by the theodicist and the evils such goods are intended to justify.

To see what is wrong with Peterson's account of gratuitous evil, consider the paradoxical nature of his claim that a given moral evil may be gratuitous even though God is justified in permitting that evil for the sake of preserving human freedom. That there appears to be something incoherent about this claim has not been lost on many commentators. John Feinberg, for example, states:

> What seems odd is that having called the evil pointless, Peterson then points out how that evil is connected to valuable things in the world. But if the evil is connected to something valuable, it appears that the evil does have a point. If the evil is genuinely pointless, then why present the free will defense, for example, to explain its point? If it is genuinely pointless, nothing will explain it. On the other hand, if the free will defense does explain its point (which it seems to do), then why call it pointless?[67]

This has led critics to think that Peterson is either equivocating in his use of the term 'gratuitous evil' or employing a very peculiar conception of gratuitous evil, one not employed by Rowe himself. All are agreed, furthermore, that once the notion of gratuitous evil is properly understood, Peterson is not in fact challenging the theological premise, but is rather a member of the theodicy tradition that rejects the factual premise.

How, then, are we to define 'gratuitous evil'? A sufficient condition, at least, for a given evil's E counting as gratuitous is that God's permission of E is not *necessary* for the obtaining of any greater (or counterbalancing) good, G. As indicated in the meta-theodicy delineated in Chapter 9, the necessity relation invoked by the theodicist is to be understood along the following lines:

(6) God's permission of E is necessary for the obtaining of $G =_{df}$ God's permission of E (or some other evil equally bad or worse than E) is logically necessary for the obtaining of G (or for the prevention of some other evil equally bad or worse than E).

But it is important not to confuse

(7) God's permission of E is logically necessary for the existence of G,

with the very different statement that

(8) The existence of *E* is logically necessary for the existence of *G*.

The difference between (7) and (8) can be brought out by considering some theodical options available to theists. So-called 'contrast' theodicies maintain that the existence of some evil in the world provides a necessary contrast to the good, so that there must be some evil if we are to have any understanding or appreciation of good. Soul-making theodicies, on the other hand, often point out that the presence of certain evils is necessary for the development of the virtues – for example, compassion, sacrificial love, and courage would be absent in a world in which people do not experience danger, pain, fear, and loss. The central thesis of these theodicies is encapsulated by (8), as the position being advanced is that the existence of some evil is logically necessary for the realization of some greater good. Free will theodicies, however, take a different line altogether. According to such theodicies, God is justified in permitting at least some moral evil on account of endowing us with free will. Clearly, it is not inevitable that someone who is created with the capacity for free choice will abuse their freedom at some stage of their life (this only becomes inevitable, or at least highly probable, when that person is given a certain nature and placed in a certain kind of environment). But then what the free will theodicist means to say is not captured by (8). Rather, the point behind the appeal to free will is that it is *God's allowing* moral evil that is necessary for the realization of the good of free will (or the goods that free will makes possible). Put negatively, God could not prevent moral evil without thereby losing the greater good of free will. That is to say, it is the *possibility* of moral evil that is necessary for the obtaining of free will.

It is now easy to see where Peterson's argument has gone astray. Peterson notes that the category of gratuitous evil may be defined along teleological lines (in which case an evil is deemed gratuitous if it is not a means to any outweighing good) or along deontological lines (where the gratuitous nature of an evil may be regarded as a function of some internal property it possesses or its lack of conformity to some absolute standard of goodness).[68] What Peterson fails to recognize, however, is that the category of gratuitous evil also admits of another important distinction: evils that are not necessary in the sense given in proposition (7), and those that are not necessary in the sense of (8). Peterson's mistake is that he conceives of the necessity relation only in terms of (8), and so a gratuitous evil for Peterson can only be an evil whose existence is not necessary for the actualization of some greater good. This is why Peterson can say that moral evils are entirely gratuitous while at the same time holding that God's reason for permitting such evils is the preservation of our free will. But if we

are to remain faithful to what theodicists typically have in mind when stating that a given evil is not pointless or what non-theists like Rowe have in mind when stating that certain evils are pointless, we cannot limit our conception of gratuitous evil to evil that is not necessary in the sense of proposition (8). Our notion of gratuitous evil must be broad enough to encapsulate the sense of necessity employed in both (7) and (8).

The somewhat surprising result is that Peterson turns out to be a 'closet theodicist'. By proposing that the benefits accrued from free will and a law-like natural system constitute God's reasons for permitting moral and natural evil, Peterson "remains embedded in the greater good tradition," as Chrzan puts it.[69] The reason this comes as a surprise is that Peterson is adamant that Rowe's factual premise is true.[70] Indeed, Peterson argues that to reject the factual premise is not only self-defeating but also inconsistent with Christian theism. His argument, briefly put, is that many of the evils of our world appear to be gratuitous – that is to say, it is part of our common human experience that many evils strike us as pointless. But if the factual premise is false (if, in other words, there is no pointless evil), then we must regard human experience as well as the moral and rational categories which condition it as essentially unreliable. This kind of scepticism, however, runs the risk of being self-defeating as well as conflicting with the belief that God created humans with generally trustworthy rational and moral faculties.[71]

Peterson, then, finds himself in a quandary: he cannot reject the factual premise without the credibility of Christian theism being diminished in his eyes, and he cannot reject the theological premise without importing a non-standard definition of gratuitous evil.

5   CONCLUSION

Summing up the results of the foregoing discussion, the theological premise does appear to be, as Rowe suggests, the strongest link in the chain of reasoning that leads Rowe to the conclusion that theism is most likely false. Van Inwagen's attempt to show that the theological premise would not hold in a world where God allowed many things to happen merely by chance raises the suspicion that van Inwagen has adopted a deistic conception of God that would be unacceptable to traditional theists. Nevertheless, van Inwagen's argument does indicate that on some level chance and hence gratuitous evil are compatible with theism – but this admission only requires the theological premise to be reformulated, not rejected altogether. Van Inwagen's more recent argument against the theological premise, based

on his No Minimum Thesis, also fails – in particular, it fails to demonstrate an incompatibility between the premise in question and van Inwagen's Thesis. Finally, Michael Peterson's critique of the doctrine of meticulous providence, as this doctrine is expressed by Rowe's theological premise, appears to be self-defeating, an appearance fostered by Peterson's failure to appreciate the different senses in which an evil can be said to be gratuitous. The end result is that the theological premise, or some version of it, cannot be rejected without departing from the understanding of God common to the historically significant varieties of theism, viz., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

NOTES

[1]   Consider, for example, the following comments: "It is logically inconsistent for a theist to admit the existence of a pointless evil" – Terence Penelhum, "Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 2 (1967): 107, and "Unnecessary evil of any kind would certainly be incongruous with an absolutely perfect God" – Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), p. 371.

[2]   Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "Is Theism Compatible with Gratuitous Evil?" *American Philosophical Quarterly* 36 (1999): 115.

[3]   Madden and Hare, *Evil and the Concept of God*, p. 3.

[4]   Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," p. 79.

[5]   Peter van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 211–35.

[6]   Van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," p. 220. Van Inwagen, therefore, is not addressing the question of whether theism is compatible with the existence of 'pure chance' – that is, events that have no (determining) cause, whether it be physical or otherwise. On this topic, see D.J. Batholomew, *God of Chance* (London: SCM Press, 1984), ch. 5, were the case in support of compatibility is put forward. This view, however, stands in contrast to the common theistic conception of chance events as occurrences not determined by anything *physical* – see, for example, P.T. Geach: "If events really are chance events, that only means that they are not predetermined by created causes, not that they escape from the knowledge and control of Divine Providence" (*Providence and Evil*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 116). Similar views are expressed by Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), pp. 142–44; Donald M. MacKay, *Science, Chance and Providence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), Section II, esp. pp. 28–31; and William Pollard, *Chance and Providence: God's Action in a World Governed by Scientific Law* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), ch. 3. Cf. Prov 16:33 ("The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord") and Mt 10: 29–30 ("Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered").

[7]   Van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," p. 220, emphasis his.

8   In what follows, I will use 'chance' in van Inwagen's sense of the term. Interestingly, van Inwagen has, in the context of the free will debate, proposed a quite different account of chance – see his "Free Will Remains a Mystery," p. 15. On the various senses in which we speak of things as happening by chance, see A.J. Ayer, "Chance," in Jack Dowie and Paul Lefrere (eds), *Risk and Chance: Selected Readings* (Milton Keynes: The Open University Press, 1980), pp. 49–51.

9   Van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," p. 221, emphasis his.

10   *Ibid.*, pp. 221–30. To avoid a possible misunderstanding with respect to this third source of chance, I should point out that van Inwagen is not denying that the initial state of things is beyond God's control. Rather, van Inwagen is merely suggesting that, were God to randomly select a particular set of initial conditions, say X, rather than some alternative set of initial conditions, Y, even though Y suits God's purposes just as well as X, then the existence of X would be due to chance (for it would be no part of God's plan that X, as opposed to Y, should exist).

11   Van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," p. 230, emphasis his.

12   *Ibid.*, p. 231.

13   *Ibid.*, p. 232, emphases his.

14   *Ibid.*, p. 235.

15   Another important implication of van Inwagen's chancy world is that it would undermine versions of the cosmological argument that rely on a principle of sufficient reason.

16   In a similar vein, Arthur Peacocke argues that one would expect God to incorporate randomness into his creation given his general policy of wanting to bring forth a high degree of variety and complexity in the universe, culminating in free-willing, self-conscious life (*Theology for a Scientific Age: Being and Becoming – Natural and Divine*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, pp. 115–21). David Bartholomew, likewise, places chance within a general policy of soul-making when stating that our environment must have "an element of the unexpected without which it would be impossible to experience surprise, excitement and challenge … Chance in our environment provides both the stimulus and the testing to promote our spiritual evolution" (*God of Chance*, p. 98). At least one difficulty with this position is that the unexpected or surprise element in our environment could have been a product of our limited epistemic powers and thus need not be generated by the existence of (objective) chance. Interestingly, Hick has proposed that much suffering must strike us as excessive or meaningless if it is to spur us to relieve the suffering of others (see Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed., pp. 333–36). But Hick's stance only requires suffering to appear gratuitous to us (or for it to be rational for us to believe that there is gratuitous suffering); it does not require the stronger thesis that there in fact exists pointless suffering.

17   See Stump, "Review of Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology*," *Philosophical Review* 106 (1997): 466–67.

18   *Ibid.*, p. 466. Stump is here referring to Jung Chang's *Wild Swans. Three Daughters of China* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), pp. 145–46, 176, 298.

19   Stump, "Review of Peter van Inwagen, *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*," p. 466. The quote is taken from Ps 4:8.

20   Alfred Freddoso charges van Inwagen with deism in his "Comment on van Inwagen's 'The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God'," April 1987, located at <http://www.nd.edu/~afreddos/papers/ chance.htm>. Van Inwagen responds to this charge in fn. 4 (pp. 215–16) of his paper, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God."

21   Rowe, "Deism," p. 853.

[22]   See van Inwagen, "The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God," pp. 215–16, fn. 4.

[23]   Einstein's actual words, addressed to fellow physicist Max Born, were: "You believe in the God who plays dice, and I in complete law and order in a world which objectively exists" (*The Born-Einstein Letters*, trans. Irene Born, London: Macmillan, 1971, p. 149). For an excellent account of the incompatibility of God and chance, from the perspective of a chaplain struggling with cancer, see Etta C. Rossman, "A God of Chance or Providence in the Face of Death and Disease?" *Journal of Pastoral Care* 39 (1985): 120–26.

[24]   Cf. Phil Dowe, "Chance and Providence," *Science and Christian Belief* 9 (1997): 18–20, where it is argued that chance events do not conflict with strong conceptions of divine providence as long as these events are no more than meaningless coincidences.

[25]   To some, this may suggest that the postulation of chance in the sub-atomic realm by quantum theory is not inconsistent with the theistic worldview. However, attempts to reconcile quantum theory with the notion of a God who acts in the world face various difficulties that are ably documented in Nicholas Saunders' recent book *Divine Action and Modern Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), chs 5 and 6.

[26]   Peter van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 65–80. The stance taken here by van Inwagen against Rowe-like evidential arguments was also proposed, though in less comprehensive form, in some of his earlier papers, in particular "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," pp. 167–68; "The Problem of Evil, the Problem of Air, and the Problem of Silence," p. 164, fn. 11; and "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell, and Gale," pp. 234–35. See also van Inwagen's Introduction to Part I of his *God, Knowledge, and Mystery: Essays in Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 15–19.

[27]   Van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," pp. 68–69.

[28]   *Ibid*., p. 69.

[29]   *Ibid*., p. 70.

[30]   *Ibid*., p. 71. Importantly, van Inwagen adds that the phrase 'is in a position to' in (MP) should be understood to mean both 'is able to' and 'is morally permitted to' (p. 72).

[31]   Van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," pp. 72–73.

[32]   *Ibid*., p. 73.

[33]   *Ibid*., pp. 72–73.

[34]   *Ibid*., p. 73.

[35]   It may be protested that the world would in fact be a much better place if the Mutilation were prevented. Van Inwagen, however, is assuming that God's plan requires the possibility of vast amounts of horrendous evil, and that this possibility was, unfortunately, realized. But then (according to van Inwagen) the subtraction of only one instance of horrific evil from the world would make, at best, a negligible difference to the overall balance of good over evil in the world. The elimination of the Mutilation would, of course, make a significant difference to the life of the sufferer, but it would make little, if any, difference to the fulfillment of God's ends.

On the other hand, if (as was argued in Chapter 10, Section 2) God's prevention of one particular misuse of free will would require him – for reasons of justice or fairness – to prevent *all* misuses of free will, then van Inwagen will not be entitled to claim that the prevention of one instance of moral evil would not endanger God's plan.

[36]   Dean Stretton raises the following objection to this line of reasoning: If a world W_1 containing n horrors serves God's purposes, then another world W_2 containing $n - 1$ horrors (in virtue of containing

less evil than W$_1$) would not serve God's purposes *equally* well. W$_2$ may still serve God's purposes, but it would do so *less* well than W$_1$. See Stretton, "Review of David O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil*," available from <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/dean_stretton/oconnor.html>. But the only justification for thinking that God's purposes are better served in W$_1$ than in W$_2$ is that there is an ideal amount of evil required for God's project. If there is no ideal amount, however, both W$_1$ and W$_2$ may do equally well.

[37]   Van Inwagen, "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," p. 76.

[38]   On pp. 78–79 of "The Argument from Particular Horrendous Evils," van Inwagen puts forward another example in illustration of the falsity of (MP), the example this time involving the necessity of making an arbitrary choice as to which children will be given a limited store of life-saving medicine and which children will miss out and hence die.

A further consequence of the No Minimum Thesis is that both level-three and level-four theodicies, as described in Section 1 of Chapter 9, cannot get off the ground. For if the amount of evil permitted by God is arbitrarily chosen, no explanation (in terms of some greater good) can be given as to why the world exhibits the amount of evil that it does rather than a lot less, and hence a Theodicy$_3$ would be impossible. Similarly, if it is a matter of arbitrary divine fiat whether a particular instance of evil is permitted or prevented, no particular evil (taken in isolation) is necessary for the realization of some greater good, thus rendering any Theodicy$_4$ impossible as well.

[39]   Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "Is Theism Compatible with Gratuitous Evil?" p. 129.

[40]   See in particular Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," pp. 288–89, Theodore Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, pp. 36–38, and David O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil*, pp. 73–75.

[41]   It is important to note that the issue here is the amount of evil God would have to *permit* in order to fulfill his ends. If, for instance, God must permit only 350 turps of evil to realize his ends, this does not entail that any world actualized by God will contain 350 turps of evil and no less. For to say that God must permit 350 turps of evil is not to say that God must bring it about that 350 turps of evil will be actualized. And so, even if God must permit 350 turps of evil, there may in fact turn out to be no evil at all if the free creatures created by God always freely chose the good.

[42]   In Figure 2, the upper boundary of the threshold need not be vaguely defined. All that is required for there to be no precise minimum amount of evil is that the lower boundary have no sharp cut-off.

[43]   Drange, *Nonbelief and Evil*, p. 37.

[44]   *Ibid*.

[45]   Van Inwagen, however, is likely to challenge noseeum inferences by deferring to a variety of sceptical theism founded on his doctrine of 'modal scepticism'. According to this doctrine, "we are largely ignorant of modal matters that are remote from the concerns of everyday life" (van Inwagen, "Introduction," in *God, Knowledge, and Mystery*, p. 11), and so the possibilities we can envisage for divine reasons for permitting evil would not even come close to exhausting the possibilities open to an omniscient, omnipotent being. Without wishing to enter into a detailed discussion of van Inwagen's modal scepticism, it may be pointed out that it is somewhat strange that one would think that the reasons God might have for permitting evil have little or no practical concern for us. For an amusing critique of van Inwagen's modal scepticism, see Richard Gale, "Some Difficulties in Theistic Treatments of Evil," pp. 211–13.

[46]   This indicates that van Inwagen's mistake occurred right at the beginning with his attempt to derive the theological premise from a moral principle that applies to all agents rather than only to agents possessing maximal power, knowledge, and goodness.

[47]   Cf. Daniel Howard-Snyder, "The Argument from Inscrutable Evil," p. 289.

[48]   I have been assuming, of course, that van Inwagen's No Minimum Thesis is correct – but see the criticisms of this Thesis raised by Jim Stone, "Evidential Atheism," *Philosophical Studies* 114 (2003): 268–73, and Jeff Jordan, "Evil and van Inwagen," *Faith and Philosophy* 20 (2003): 236–39.

[49]   Peterson's most detailed treatment of the theological premise appears in *Evil and the Christian God*, chs 4 and 5, and in "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," unpublished paper read at the State University of New York (Buffalo, NY), September 14, 2000. See also Peterson, "Evil and Inconsistency," *Sophia* 18 (1979): 24, "The Inductive Problem of Evil," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 33 (1981): 85–86, and *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, pp. 103–05.

[50]   See Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 93–95.

[51]   William Hasker, "Must God Do His Best?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 16 (1984): 216. Hasker's description of meticulous providence calls to mind what Gregory Boyd has dubbed 'the blueprint worldview' – the view that the world was created according to a detailed divine blueprint which assigns a specific divine reason for every occurrence in history (see Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 11–13). But meticulous providence need not be characterized in this way. Instead, it may be taken to consist in the view that there are reasons as to why God permits various kinds of evil even though there may be no reason why God permits some particular instance of evil. And this, in turn, would bring the doctrine of meticulous providence in line with the conclusions of Section 1 above.

[52]   See, in particular, William Hasker's case against Rowe's theological premise in chs 4 and 5 of his *Providence, Evil and the Openness of God*. Rowe's response to Hasker can be found in "Ruminations about Evil," pp. 79–86. See also O'Connor's critique of Hasker in *God and Inscrutable Evil*, pp. 53–70. For an argument of a quite different sort against the theological premise, see Keith Yandell, "Gratuitous Evil and Divine Existence," *Religious Studies* 25 (1989): 15–30; but see also Keith Chrzan, "God and Gratuitous Evil: A Reply to Yandell," *Religious Studies* 27 (1991): 99–103. Further challenges to Rowe's theological premise are posed by George Schlesinger's novel 'no-best-possible-world' defence (a good outline and assessment of which can be found in O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil*, ch. 7) and the anti-Molinist objection that, given that there is no middle knowledge, there can be no meticulous providence (see Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge*, chs 2 and 10, esp. pp. 202–04).

[53]   Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," p. 7 (page numbers refer to my printed version of this unpublished paper).

[54]   *Ibid*.

[55]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 337. Similarly, Stephen Wykstra writes that the theological premise is "a basic conceptual truth deserving assent by theists and nontheists alike" ("The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering," p. 76).

[56]   This view of the modal status of basic moral principles seems to be espoused by Rowe in "William Alston on the Problem of Evil," p. 92.

[57]   See Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," p. 7.

[58]   See Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 336, fn. 3.

59   Reitan, "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" p. 310, emphasis his.

60   In "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" pp. 312–14, Reitan correctly notes that this strategy of construing the notion of a 'greater good' broadly enough to allow for deontological considerations carries the unfortunate implication that deontological considerations are to be 'weighed' against others in a consequentialist fashion (e.g., weighing the value of obedience to the moral principle of not interfering with some person's free will against the disvalue of the evils permitted in the name of such obedience). But this, as Reitan recognizes, merely forces a reformulation of the theological premise: God is justified in permitting an evil *E* only if the prevention of *E* results in the loss of some greater good *G* or the violation of some deontological moral requirement (see Reitan, "Does the Argument from Evil Assume a Consequentialist Morality?" p. 316).

61   See Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," p. 8.

62   Although Peterson explicitly adopts Christian theism as his point of reference, his offensive strategy could just as easily be employed by non-Christian theists.

63   Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," p. 9, emphases his. See also Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 102–07.

64   Peterson, "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," p. 9. See also Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 107–17.

65   Peterson adds that both the actuality and possibility of gratuitous evil play an important role in creating the epistemic distance required for the process of soul-making. Thus, insofar as God's purposes involve soul-making, gratuitous evil is a necessary element in any theistic worldview (see Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 117–19). Indeed, such considerations, according to Peterson, provide one with the materials to construct an evidential argument from evil *in support of* the existence of God. For if the existence of gratuitous evil is exactly what one would expect if theism were true, then the existence of such evil tends to confirm the truth of theism. See Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 130–33, and "Evil as Evidence for the Existence of God," in David Basinger and Wesley Vanderhoof (eds), *Kerygma and Praxis: Essays in Honor of Stanley R. Magill* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life Press, 1984), pp. 125–27.

66   The critics in question are: Keith Chrzan, "When Is a Gratuitous Evil Really Gratuitous?" *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 24 (1988): 87–91; Melville Stewart, *The Greater-Good Defence*, pp. 77–82; John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 262–78; and Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, "Is Theism Compatible with Gratuitous Evil?" pp. 118–19. Not surprisingly, Hasker's argument against meticulous providence, as it has much in common with Peterson's argument, has occasioned criticisms of a similar nature – see Rowe, "Ruminations about Evil," pp. 79–86; Chrzan, "Necessary Gratuitous Evil: An Oxymoron Revisited," *Faith and Philosophy* 11 (1994): 134–37; and Howard-Snyder, "Is Theism Compatible with Gratuitous Evil?" pp. 119–27.

67   Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil*, p. 270.

68   See Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 96–97.

69   Chrzan, "When Is a Gratuitous Evil Really Gratuitous?" p. 90.

70   For Peterson's defence of the factual premise, see his *Evil and the Christian God*, pp. 89–93, and "The Necessity of Gratuitous Evil," pp. 6–7.

[71]   This is an interesting argument, but it suffers from the following defects. First, at least one variety of theism – viz., sceptical theism – is not incompatible with the falsity of the factual premise. For according to sceptical theists, our cognitive condition is such that evil is bound to strike us as gratuitous whether or not evil is in fact gratuitous. On this view, our cognitive faculties are usually reliable, but not when they are employed to discern God's purposes.

Second, consider Peterson's claim that, if the common predisposition to believe that there exists gratuitous evil is untrustworthy, this would count against the truth of theism. But are we not predisposed to believe all manner of false beliefs (for example, the belief that the earth is flat, or beliefs formed by fallacious reasoning as occurs in the gambler's fallacy)? If so, then it seems we have the makings here of an atheological argument. (I am indebted to Graham Oppy for bringing this second point to my attention.)

13. CONCLUSION: IS ROWE'S EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT SUCCESSFUL?

The primary aim of this study is to determine whether the evidential argument from evil developed by Rowe during his early and middle period can be considered a success. But to be able to assess the merits of atheological arguments like Rowe's it is necessary to develop some criteria against which the success of such arguments can be measured. In Chapter 1, therefore, the following criteria were proposed as the minimum requirements that must be met before any argument *A* against the existence of God can be considered successful:

(1) The conclusion of *A* asserts (or obviously entails) that God does not exist;
(2) *A* is formally valid;
(3) *A* is informally valid;
(4) It is reasonable for *S* to believe that the premises of *A* are true, where *S* refers to the person offering the argument and, possibly, some members of that person's audience, and
(5) The background information *k*, from which the premises of *A* are drawn, is such that Pr (G/k) = 0.5 and Pr $(\sim G/k)$ = 0.5, where '*G*' corresponds to 'God exists'.

Our leading question can now be put a bit more precisely: Does Rowe's evidential argument meet conditions (1)–(5) above?

There is little doubt that Rowe's argument meets conditions (1), (2), (3), and (5). The critical question, then, is whether the premises that go to make up Rowe's argument are rationally acceptable. Of course, the question as stated is incomplete, for it remains to be asked *for whom* and *under what circumstances* could the premises of Rowe's argument be rationally

acceptable. This inevitably means that our answer to the question of whether it is rational for a person to accept the premises of Rowe's argument may vary depending on the particular person we have in mind and the circumstances that person finds herself in. But let's assume that the kind of person we are concerned with is an intellectually sophisticated adult (but not necessarily a professional philosopher) who is aware of, and understands, the kinds of issues raised in support of and against evidential arguments from evil. Can it be rational for such a person to accept the premises of Rowe's argument? To answer this question, we may defer to the results of my assessment of Rowe's argument as undertaken in Chapters 4–12.

These results may be divided into three parts. First, the 'sceptical theist' objection to Rowe's inference from inscrutable evil to pointless evil was examined in Chapters 4–8 and was found to be inadequately supported. Second, various theodical options were canvassed in Chapters 10 and 11 as a possible way of refuting Rowe's factual premise, and it was found that a theodicy that appeals to the goods of free will, soul-making, and a heavenly afterlife goes much of the way (though not all the way) in accounting for horrendous moral evil. The most important finding from this investigation, however, was that natural evil – of any kind, amount, or distribution – remains beyond the pale of theodical explanation. Third, some challenges to Rowe's theological premise were considered in Chapter 12, but these were shown to be unsuccessful. On the basis of these results, it may be concluded that there are strong grounds for accepting the key premises underwriting Rowe's argument, viz., the factual and theological premises. For this reason, I would consider it rational (for an intellectually sophisticated adult apprised of the relevant information) to believe that the premises of Rowe's argument are true. And this, in turn, means that Rowe's evidential argument can be judged a success.[1]

Having reached this verdict on Rowe's argument, what follows? In particular, what follows for the theist who agrees with my assessment of Rowe's argument but is not entirely willing to give up on theism? There are at least two options available to such a theist, and in the remainder of this chapter I will consider the merits of each.

1   THE 'G.E. MOORE SHIFT'

One option, highlighted and endorsed by Rowe himself, involves a strategy used on various occasions by G.E. Moore against the arguments of sceptical philosophers like David Hume.[2] Moore noted that sceptical arguments

purporting to show that there are no material objects usually run something like this:

(6) Sceptical principles X and Y are correct.
(7) If sceptical principles X and Y are correct, I cannot know of the existence of this pencil.
(8) (Therefore) I cannot know of the existence of this pencil.

When attempting to refute such an argument, most philosophers would take direct aim at one or both of its premises. But the premises employed by the sceptic are renowned for being either eminently plausible or very difficult to refute directly. Moore, therefore, opted for a more indirect strategy, which he represented as follows:

(9) I do know that this pencil exists.
(10) If sceptical principles X and Y are correct, I cannot know of the existence of this pencil.
(11) (Therefore) Sceptical principles X and Y (or at least one of them) must be incorrect.

Schematically, the sceptic's argument may be characterized as follows:

I. *P*
    Q

    R

Moore's argument, by contrast, displays the following form:

II. not-*R*
     Q
----
     not-*P*.

As Moore observed, arguments of type-I and arguments of type-II are equally valid, and both arguments share the same second premise. The choice between any two such arguments must therefore come down to a choice between their respective first premises. In the debate between Moore and the sceptic, for example, we must decide which of the following premises it is more rational to accept: 'I do know that this pencil exists' or 'Sceptical principles X and Y are correct'. And it is obvious, Moore claimed, that his own first premise is the more rational one to believe.[3]

Moore's strategy, then, consists in challenging arguments of type-I by turning such arguments on their head – that is to say, the conclusion of type-I arguments is rejected and then the denial of that conclusion is employed as the first premise in one's counter-argument. Rowe has dubbed this way of responding to an argument 'the G.E. Moore shift', and he has suggested that this strategy may be appropriated by the theist as a way of countering his own evidential argument. The theist, in other words, may argue as follows:

(12)   There exists an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

(13)   An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any horrific evil it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

(14)   (Therefore) It is not the case that there exist instances of horrific evil which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

Both Rowe's evidential argument and the above theistic argument employ premise (13) – that is, the theological premise. The above argument, however, begins with very the denial of the conclusion of Rowe's argument, and herein lies its application of the G.E. Moore shift.

Although this strategy has been welcomed by many theists as an entirely valid way of responding to evidential arguments from evil[4] – indeed, it is considered by Rowe to be "the theist's best response"[5] – it is deeply problematic in a way that is often overlooked. The G.E. Moore shift is effective only if the grounds for accepting not-R in a type-II argument are more compelling than the grounds for accepting P in a type-I argument. Therefore, the theist who makes use of the G.E. Moore shift needs to have evidence in support of (12) (the existence of the theistic God) that is more compelling than the evidence in support of not-(14) (the existence of gratuitous evil). The problem here is that the kind of evidence that is typically appealed to by theists in order to substantiate the existence of God – for example, the three traditional theistic proofs – does not even aim to establish the existence of a *perfectly good* being, or else, if it does have such an aim, it faces formidable difficulties in fulfilling it. I have elaborated on this matter in Section 2 of Chapter 1, and so I will not say anything more about it here. But if this position is correct, then the theist may well be unable to offer any evidence at all in support of (12), or at least any evidence of a sufficiently strong or cogent nature in support of (12). The G.E. Moore shift, therefore, is not as straightforward a strategy as it initially seems.[6]

2   RECONCEIVING GOD

If the theist cannot appeal to evidence in support of the existence of God in order to defeat Rowe's evidential argument, there remains only one further option short of abandoning theism altogether: viz., altering one's conception of God by modifying one or more of the central tenets of 'orthodox theism' (as this notion was explicated in Section 1 of Chapter 2). Although this is in some ways a quite radical response to the problem of evil, it seems to enjoy a wide degree of support. The turn towards a non-standard version of theism usually takes one of two forms.

2.1   Rejecting God's Perfect Goodness

On the face of it, rejecting the perfect goodness of God appears to be the least likely route a theist would take in response to the (logical or evidential) problem of evil. But many theists have taken just this route. Here is a small sample.

David Blumenthal, a well-known Jewish theologian, affirms the reality of God's presence, power, and love but at the same time argues that, in the light of various Scriptural texts as well as evils such as the Holocaust and child sex abuse, we are compelled to add a further attribute to God – 'abusiveness':

> God, as portrayed in our holy sources and as experienced by humans throughout the ages, acts, from time to time, in a manner that is so unjust that it can only be characterized by the term "abusive". In this mode, God allows the innocent to suffer greatly. In this mode, God "caused" the holocaust, or allowed it to happen.[7]

John Roth, a liberal Protestant who has made a significant contribution to Holocaust studies, champions a 'theodicy of protest' which rejects all attempts to justify God's permission of evil and instead emphasizes God's complicity in evil. In Roth's words:

> God possesses – but fails to use well enough – the power to intervene decisively at any moment to make history's course less wasteful. Thus, in spite and because of God's sovereignty, this God is everlastingly guilty, and the degrees run from gross negligence to murder.[8]

On this view, God's penchant for needless suffering impugns his total goodness, thus leading Roth to "affirm that God is good, but not perfectly good, and that both God and humanity could be better."[9]

Brian Davies, a Catholic philosopher heavily indebted to the work of Thomas Aquinas, rejects the attribution of moral goodness to God. He contends that, even though God can be said to be good in some non-moral sense, it is "wholly inappropriate to think of God as something able to be either moral (well behaved) or immoral (badly behaved)."[10] Davies provides a number of reasons for thinking that God cannot be a moral agent. He notes, for example, that God is traditionally thought to be the source of all beings. But to distinguish God from all beings, God cannot be thought of as a being existing alongside other beings. Moral agents are, of course, beings, some of whom are good and some of whom are bad. God, however, is not a being, and so God cannot properly be spoken of as a moral agent. Furthermore, a moral agent is someone who in some sense can succeed or fail – for example, she can succeed if she acts morally where others have failed to do so. But it makes no sense to talk of God as succeeding or failing.[11] For reasons such as these, Davies is led to the following bleak conclusion:

> To be blunt, I suggest that many contemporary philosophers writing on the problem of evil (both theists and non-theists) have largely been wasting their time … They are like people attacking or defending tennis players because they fail to run a mile in under four minutes. Tennis players are not in the business of running four-minute miles. Similarly, God is not something with respect to which moral evaluation (whether positive or negative) is appropriate.[12]

2.2   Rejecting Divine Omnipotence

Another, and far more popular, response to the problem of evil consists in rejecting divine omnipotence, or at least conceptualizing the property of omnipotence in a way that would be inconsistent with traditional forms of theism.

Process theists are perhaps the best known exponents of this line of response. Following in the footsteps of Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin maintains that "the creatures' twofold creative power of self-determination and efficient causation cannot be canceled, overridden, or completely controlled by God."[13] And so, in contrast to orthodox theists, Griffin denies that God is omnipotent in the sense of having the power to unilaterally control all aspects of reality. He does not wish to deny, however, that God is all-powerful "not only in the sense of being the supreme power of the universe but also in the sense of being perfect in

power, having all the power one being could possibly have."[14] But he does concede that, on the process theist view, God cannot unilaterally determine any state of affairs or unilaterally prevent any evil from coming into being. In his view,

> God's power is the creative power to evoke or persuade; it is not the unilateral power to stop, to constrain, to destroy. The reason God does not intervene in nature or human affairs to prevent some of the worst evils is not that God is evil or indifferent, or that to do so would run counter to God's policy; it is simply that God's power is of a different kind.[15]

Thus, by imposing limitations on divine power, process theists claim to greatly reduce the extent of God's responsibility for the evil in the world.[16]

In addition to process theists, various other theists have sought to place restrictions on divine power in the light of the problem of evil. For example, the so-called 'Boston personalists', Edgar Brightman and Peter Bertocci, were well-known for attempting to resolve the problem of evil by breaking with orthodox belief in an omnipotent God. In Bertocci's words,

> Out of respect for what seem the facts of human experience, it seems necessary to modify our conceptions of God. If we deny God's good- ness, we are in fact denying that the cosmic Mind is God, for goodness is supreme in qualifying a being as God. If we limit God's reason and knowledge, we cannot account for the order of nature and man as we know it. The most reasonable suggestion is to limit God's power.[17]

More recently, rabbi Harold Kushner, in his best-selling book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, has stated that he could come to terms with a God who has permitted the death of his son from a rare premature ageing disease only by recognizing certain limitations in God's power (specifically, Kushner holds that God is "limited in what He can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom"[18]). In a simi- lar vein, John Bishop has suggested that theists can make progress on the problem of evil only by giving up divine omnipotence. More precisely, it is God – according to Bishop – who ought to be viewed as giving up his omnipotence (so as to preserve his perfect goodness) after having created the world. Bishop therefore states that "theists should reject the concept of God as an agent outside the natural order who has an absolutely unlimited power of intervention within nature."[19] Similar proposals abound in the literature on the problem of evil.[20]

2.3   The Worship–Worthiness of God

The foregoing modifications in the orthodox conception of God may succeed in resolving the problem of evil insofar as the existence of evil (or certain amounts or types of evil) is no longer mysterious given the relevant limitations in the divine nature. One may object, however, that the proposed 'cure' is worse than the 'disease'. For in limiting God in any of the above ways in order to meet the problem posed by evil, it seems that we end up with a God who is no longer fit to be the object of our worship, total devotion, unconditional commitment, or love and trust. We are presented, in other words, with a God who is not able to evoke the kinds of attitudes and practices that have played a central role in theistic religions.

Is there any substance to this criticism? Let's begin with proposals involving the rejection of God's perfect goodness. It is abundantly clear, I think, that the line of thought developed by writers such as Blumenthal and Roth, according to which God is omnipotent but limited in goodness, renders God unworthy of worship. For if it is within God's power to prevent or eliminate any evil in the world, and yet God permits (or even inflicts) evil simply due to a lack of concern for the welfare of his creatures, then we would be entirely justified in taking such a deity to be a moral monster. It is therefore difficult to understand how Blumenthal and Roth can retain any measure of devotion and commitment towards their God.[21]

The approach taken by Brian Davies is a little more nuanced, as he does not think of God's moral goodness as limited but rather refuses to ascribe any moral properties at all to God. On this view, the statement 'God is good' should not be interpreted to mean that God is a moral agent or that God is morally well-behaved. Rather, to say that God is good is just to say that God is a (or the) fully realized instance of his kind (viz., divinity) – much as we speak of a 'good house' or a 'good holiday' without suggesting that we are talking in moral terms.[22] But, once again, the worship-worthiness of such a God is questionable. For if God is non-moral by nature, he cannot exhibit affective attitudes such as love and concern towards his creatures. It would therefore be impossible to enter into a *reciprocal* relationship with God, and it would be difficult, if not inappropriate, to express common theistic attitudes (of love, adoration, praise, and gratitude) towards God, at least in the degree to which we are enjoined to express such attitudes. In short, Davies' God appears morally indifferent or impersonal and hence unfit for worship.[23]

Do proposals to limit God's power fare any better? The answer largely depends on the extent of the limitations imposed on God's power. It is widely thought, for example, that God's inability to perform logically impossible feats (such as creating a square circle or altering the past) are no

stain on God's perfection and worship-worthiness. But the limitations that would need to be made to divine power in order to resolve the problem of evil are far more significant. Indeed, God's power would have to be reduced to such an extent that he could not do anything that is *empirically* impossible. For if God permits the emergence and spread of something like AIDS, not because he wishes to attain some higher good, but simply because he lacks the power to rid the world of AIDS, then his power would be bound by the laws of nature (not just the laws of logic). But then God can do nothing above and beyond what a mere human being can do. We cannot eliminate the AIDS virus simply by means of a decree or an act of will, and neither can God. But a God whose power is no greater than a human's is an unlikely object of worship.[24]

3   CONCLUDING REMARKS

It seems, then, that the price to be paid for modifying the orthodox conception of God in the foregoing respects is too high, for even if such modifications dissolve the problem of evil, they also have a corrosive effect on religiously significant attitudes and practices such as the love and worship of God. The strategy of resorting to the 'G.E. Moore shift' as a way out of the problem of evil also faces significant difficulties. Much depends here on what other evidence one claims to have in support of the existence of a perfect being. But as pointed out in Section 2 of Chapter 1, the task of furnishing such evidence is daunting, to say the least.

The significance of these results for theism may be put as follows. If, as I have argued in Chapters 4–12, Rowe's evidential argument successfully withstands the most powerful objections raised against it, and if the more indirect ways of responding to Rowe's argument discussed in the present chapter (i.e., the G.E. Moore shift and revisions to the concept of God) prove to be unsatisfactory, then the only rational course of action left for the theist to take is to abandon theism and convert to atheism. This is by no means a novel conclusion, but it has been reached largely by way of a much neglected route, viz., by highlighting *theism's inability to account for any natural evil at all*.

My conclusion, then, stands in stark contrast to the common irenic view that, once all sides to the debate over the evidential problem of evil have been given a proper hearing, we arrive at a kind of stalemate or détente, with neither side in a position to claim victory.[25] Against this view, I have argued that Rowe's arguments succeed in settling the matter in favour of atheism. This conclusion, however, is necessarily provisional and tentative. For one

thing, it remains to be seen whether the theist can, against seemingly high
odds, meet the challenge of finding evidence in support of theism that out-
weighs the evidence of evil. And in spite of the ever-increasing literature on
the problem of evil, there always remains room for further investigation as
old lines of inquiry fall into disrepute and new streams of thought rise to
prominence. The current debate over open theism, for example, raises the
question as to which model of divine providence – the openness of God
model, the Molinist model, or the Calvinist model – has the better resources
for dealing with the problem of evil. I have briefly touched on this topic in
the present study, but it clearly merits closer examination. No-one can
claim, therefore, to have said the last word on God and evil. For some this is
merely cause for frustration or resignation; but for the rest of us it reveals
the fascination and beauty of all philosophical problems.

NOTES

[1]   In claiming that it can be rational to accept the premises of Rowe's argument, I do not mean
to endorse the quite different claim that it cannot be rational to reject the premises of Rowe's argu-
ment. Indeed, it would seem that any sound epistemology of religious belief must be committed to
what Rowe has called 'friendly atheism', according to which someone who accepts atheism may
also believe that at least some people are rationally justified in believing that God exists (see
Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 340). Thus, one who is persuaded
by Rowe's evidential argument need not take up an 'unfriendly' variety of atheism.

But even a friendly atheist who accepts Rowe's argument must assume that the epistemic
position of the theist is, in some respects, inferior to her own. Otherwise, the friendly atheist
may end up holding to the paradoxical, if not incoherent, position that a person S_1 is rational in
accepting P while another person S_2 is rational in accepting not-P even though both S_1 and S_2
share exactly the same evidence and background beliefs (and assess the evidence in the light of
their background beliefs in the same way). See Shane Andre, "The Problem of Evil and the
Paradox of Friendly Atheism," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 17 (1985):
209–16.

[2]   See, for example, Moore, *Some Main Problems of Philosophy* (London: George Allen and
Unwin, 1953), ch. 6. My outline of Moore's argumentative strategy follows Rowe's presentation
in "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 339.

[3]   This is how Rowe presents Moore's anti-sceptical argument. Moore, however, did not argue
that it is more *rational* to believe his first premise than the sceptic's first premise; rather, Moore
argued that his first premise can be *known* with a greater degree of certainty than any other prem-
ise which could be used to prove that his first premise is false. See Moore, *Some Main Problems
of Philosophy*, p. 125. For an illuminating account of Moore's strategy for dealing with sceptical
arguments, see Barry Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1984), ch. 3. Like many critics, Stroud contends that Moore's response to scepticism is
question-begging; irrespective of whether this view is correct, I think it is clear that the theist who
employs Moore's strategy need not be open to the same charge.

[4]   See, for example, George Mavrodes, *Belief in God*, pp. 95–97; C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking About Faith*, pp. 138–39; Stephen Davis, "What Good Are Theistic Proofs?" pp. 86–87; and David Basinger, *The Case for Freewill Theism*, pp. 100–03.

[5]   Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," p. 339.

[6]   This is not to say, however, that such a strategy cannot be successfully employed by the theist. In fact, as I noted in Section 1 of Chapter 1, my personal view is that it can. In other words, I hold that a strong cumulative case can be developed in support of theism that defeats the evidence against theism generated by the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness.

[7]   David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abusing God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 247. Blumenthal's views may be compared to C.J. Jung's conception of God as having both a good side and a 'dark side', this duality in the divine nature leading Jung to state that, "one can love God but must fear him" (*Answer to Job*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, London: Routledge, 2002 [originally published in German in 1952], p. 115). See also John Shelby Spong, *A New Christianity For a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying and How a New Faith Is Being Born* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), p. 166, who draws on Jung in his conception of divinity.

      I may add here that one can reject the perfect goodness of God, not by positing an evil side in God or holding God's goodness to be finite, but by taking God to be amoral or morally indifferent – this, indeed, is the option favoured by Philo in Part XI of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

[8]   John K. Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest," in Stephen Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 2nd ed., p. 14.

[9]   Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest," p. 31. Frederick Sontag, also a Christian, has taken a similar stance in response to the problem of evil. It is not clear, however, whether Sontag is proposing a non-standard conception of perfect goodness, or whether he is (like Roth) proposing that God may be good and loving, but not perfectly good and loving. In response to some critics, for example, he writes that, "I do not want to say that God is 'partly malevolent'. He is guided by goodness, but that goodness is less serene and allows more latitude than we might like" ("Response to Critiques," in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 1st ed., p. 161). Later on, in a similar vein, he states that, "I do believe in divine goodness … I just do not think what good means is either evident, simple, beyond debate, or excludes evil" ("Response to Critiques," p. 162). And yet, earlier on he has written that, since all attempts "to see God as purely good and loving" have failed, "a God of some wrath and even violence has returned" ("Anthropodicy and the Return of God," in Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil*, 1st ed., p. 150). See also Sontag's *The God of Evil: An Argument from the Existence of the Devil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), where Sontag encourages the development of a new understanding of divine goodness in the light of undeserved suffering.

[10] Davies, "The Problem of Evil," in Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide to the Subject* (London: Cassell, 1998), p. 178.

[11] Davies offers two further reasons for denying that God is a moral agent: God cannot be thought of as having duties or obligations, and cardinal virtues such as prudence, temperateness, and courage cannot intelligibly be ascribed to God. Davies develops his solution to the problem of evil and defends it from various criticisms in "The Problem of Evil," pp. 177–82; *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982 [first edition], pp. 22–24; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993 [second edition], pp. 47–53; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [third edition], pp. 226–30); and "How Is God Love?" in Luke Gormally (ed.), *Moral*

Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994), pp. 100–106. Davies presents his views on God's goodness as drawn in large part from Aquinas' views on this matter, which are outlined in Davies' *Aquinas* (London: Continuum, 2002), ch. 14. Brian Shanley, however, contends that Davies has misrepresented Aquinas – see Shanley, *The Thomist Tradition* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), pp. 115–16.

[12]   Davies, "The Problem of Evil," p. 182. Roy Holland has also argued that it is inappropriate to think of God as having a morally sufficient reason for doing or permitting something, since "having or failing to have a moral reason presupposes membership of a moral community," and God cannot be thought of as a member of a moral community (*Against Empiricism: On Education, Epistemology and Value*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980, p. 238).

A related view, quite popular amongst theologians, is the idea that God's goodness differs from human goodness not merely in degree but also in kind, so that God's goodness cannot be understood by humans. This naturally leads to the view that it is inappropriate to judge the actions of God by standards of goodness that humans can apprehend. Proponents of this position, unlike Davies and Holland, accept the claim that God is perfectly good; nevertheless, like Davies and Holland, they regard it improper for human beings to pass any moral judgments on God. For a good discussion and critique of the thesis that divine goodness is unintelligible to ordinary human reason, see G. Stanley Kane, "The Concept of Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil," *Religious Studies* 11 (1984): 49–71.

[13]   Griffin, *Reenchantment without Supernaturalism*, p. 224.

[14]   *Ibid*.

[15]   Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, p. 24.

[16]   On the process theist view of divine omnipotence, see also Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 10–26.

[17]   Peter Bertocci, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1951), pp. 417–18. Bertocci goes on to point out (in pp. 423–37) that the power of God is limited by a recalcitrant aspect of God's own nature, dubbed by Brightman 'The Given'. For Brightman's defence of a God of finite power, see his *The Problem of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), ch. 5, and *A Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1940), ch. 9. Personalism was a philosophical movement that rose to prominence in the first half of the twentieth century; it held that the concept of personhood is indispensable and central to a proper understanding of reality. In the United States, the movement originated with Borden Parker Bowne (1847–1910), whose legacy was carried on by both Brightman (1884–1932) and Bertocci (1910–89) – all three taught philosophy at Boston University, hence the appellation 'Boston personalism'.

[18]   Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), p. 134.

[19]   John Bishop, "Evil and the Concept of God," *Philosophical Papers* 22 (1993): 13.

[20]   For a good historical overview of the various attempts made to limit God's power in response to the problem of evil, see Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 286–301. According to Brightman, among those who have championed a God of limited power are Plato (particularly through the concept of the Demiurge in his *Timaeus*), Marcion, the Manicheans, Pierre Bayle, John Stuart Mill, F.C.S. Schiller, William James, H.G. Wells, Henri Bergson, and A.N. Whitehead. Cf. J.M.E. McTaggart's preference for a non-omnipotent God over an omnipotent God in *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), chs 6 and 7. A less popular but equally

effective way of resolving the problem of evil is to reject the omniscience of God (though this is not to be confused with the adoption of a particular conception of omniscience, as with open theism and Molinism).

[21]   A similar criticism is made by P.J. McGrath, "Evil and the Existence of a Finite God," *Analysis* 46 (1986): 64. Roth, however, contends that expressions of protest (against God) have just as much a place in worship as expressions of thanksgiving and praise ("A Theodicy of Protest," pp. 36–37). But the God envisioned by Roth would *only* inspire indignation of the kind displayed by Ivan Karamazov (in Book V, ch. 4 of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*), and it is not clear how a life of commitment and service to God can rest entirely on such feelings of indignation.

[22]   See Davies, "The Problem of Evil," p. 178.

[23]   But see Davies, "How Is God Love?" pp. 106–10, where he attempts to makes sense of the idea of a non-moral but loving God (an idea that, in my view at least, is impossible to make sense of).

[24]   Similar views are expressed by William Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1999), p. 72, and A.M. Weisberger, *Suffering Belief: Evil and the Anglo-American Defense of Theism* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), p. 93. A further problem with a good but non-omnipotent God is that it would be inappropriate to place one's hope in such a God, whether it be hope for one's salvation or for the fulfillment of God's purposes. As McTaggart put it, "we have no right to be confident as to the eventual victory of those ends in which God [i.e., a good but non-omnipotent God] is interested. We know that he will work for them, and we know that they will be the more triumphant or the less defeated because of his efforts. But we do not know that they will be completely triumphant. Nor is this all. We do not even know that they will not be almost completely defeated" (*Some Dogmas of Religion*, pp. 259–60). In addition, it may be wondered whether the problem of evil is at all resolved by limiting God's power. For as long as God knows that if he were to create a world like ours then a great deal of gratuitous evil will result, no limitation in God's power will suffice to absolve him of culpability for deciding to proceed with creation. On this and other problems with the notion of a God limited in power, see Madden and Hare, *Evil and the Concept of God*, pp. 107–14.

[25]   For a defence of this irenic proposal, see David O'Connor, *God and Inscrutable Evil*, ch. 10, and Klaas Kraay, *Possible Worlds and the Problem of Evil*, pp. 152–66.

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